THE LIFE OF MUḤAMMAD (S.A.W.)

IN BRITISH SCHOLARSHIP
- A CRITIQUE OF THREE KEY
MODERN BIOGRAPHIES OF
THE PROPHET MUḤAMMAD (S.A.W.)

BY

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SYNOPSIS

This is a study of the biographical works of three prominent British scholars on the Prophet Muḥammad (S.A.W.). Sir William Muir, David Samuel Margoliouth and William Montgomery Watt have been selected due to the impact their works on Muḥammad has made upon both Muslims and non-Muslims in the English-speaking world.

One of the central issues investigated has to do with Medieval polemical ideas and their survival in our period of enlightened scholarship. The issue is of great significance in a world where the geo-political scene is very unpredictable despite the apparent desire in many quarters for Inter-Faith Relations. If Inter-Faith Relations are to have any real positive effect, then there is the need to excise from people's consciousness some of the Medieval war psychosis propaganda which have created a caricature of Islam in the minds of many people. Mutual respect and trust are necssary

In the Medieval thinking because of the circumstances, Islam had to be painted as an enemy and hence Muḥammad had to take the brunt. In our modern era there seems to be signs of calls for that painting to be retouched. It is in the books of eminent scholars like those the thesis deals with which perhaps continuously confirm some of these Medieval pictures. Hence, the thesis seeks to point these out.

The scientific method creates avenues for the dispassionate study of a subject and hence contributes to a judicious application of sound academic principles. The thesis upholds this and insists that since our world is now a global village, the need to know and understand each other increases daily but this can only be done if we are sincere, honest, and fair in our outlook on each other.

The apparent conscious effort among some scholars to denigrate Islam and Muslims especially by recreating a Medieval-image of Muḥammad does not help in creating the trust we need in each other.

It is our prayer that the thesis would, in a small way, contribute in awakening people to consciously question the dominant Western opinions about Islam and Muslims in general and about Muḥammad in particular.

Approximately 80,000 words.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my parents

the late Papa Bukr Kwesi Munkwaabo

and

the late Maame Hawa Adwoa Ketseaba

whose sweat and toil

took me to school.

It is also dedicated to all scholars

who endeavour to project the truth.

SUPPLICATION

If I have written anything contrary to the
true teachings of Islam as presented
by the Holy Prophet Muḥammad (S.A.W.)
or if there is anything which directly
or indirectly denies the truth in God
and His Messenger and His revealed
word the Holy Qur'ān, I beg for
forgiveness from Him who is the
Ar-Raḥmān Ar-Raḥīm.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to all those who, in one way or the other, have helped me in bringing this project to a final conclusion after all these nerve-wrecking years.

If I can attempt to mention some names I recall Dr. (now Professor) David Kerr who started the supervision with me, Dr. Jorgen S. Nielsen who took over and became more of a colleague, confidant and a father than a supervisor and indeed all the staff of the C.S.I.C., Birmingham who offered various means of support.

I need to record the kind offer of a Teaching Fellowship at the C.S.I.C. which sustained me during the last lap. I would also like to acknowledge the generous assistance obtained from the Lembaga Bersekutu Pemegang Amānah Pengajian Tinggi Islam Malaysia.

Further, I am particularly indebted to the Yayasān Amān Berhād, Malaysia, for facilitating my trip to and stay in Birmingham to complete this research.

My employers, the International Islamic University, Malaysia also deserve my profound appreciation for agreeing to suspend my contract to enable me to travel to the U.K. to push the thesis off the brink.

As for my wife and children, I can only speak with the highest praise of the good humour and resilience with which they endured my vagaries and eccentricities during the long and gruelling years I was on this project. I apologise for all that they have been through just because of my rather selfish attempt to obtain a higher degree.

To all my friends both in the U.K. and Malaysia who continuously urged me on when the going became tough, I say Jazākumullāho Khairan Kathirā.

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PART I

PART II

JOURNALS CONSULTED

AHR	American Historical Review
AJISS	American Journal of Islamic Social Scientists
AQR	Asiatic Quarterly Review
AREA	Arabica-Revue d'Etudes Arabes
BO	Bibliotheca Orientalis
BSOAS	Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies
BZAZ	Beilage Zur Allgemeinen Zeitung
CHR	Catholic Historical Review
CMI	The Church Missionary Intelligencer
CR	Calcutta Review
DI	Der Islam
HI	Hamdard Islamicus
HIS	Humaniora Islamica
HJ	The Hibbert Journal
HTR	Hartford Theological Review
IC	Islamic Culture
ICMR	Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations
IJISS	International Journal of Islamic Social Scientists
IJMES	International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies
IL	Islamic Literature

IMA	Islam and the Modern Age
IOQ	Islamic Order Quarterly
IOS	Israel Oriental Studies
IQ	Islamic Quarterly
IRM	International Review of Mission
IS	Islamic Studies
JASB	Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JESHO	Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient
JIJ	Journal of Jewish Studies
JIS	Journal of Islamic Studies
JNES	Journal of Near Eastern Studies
JPHS	Journal of Pakistani Historical Society
JQR	Jewish Quarterly Review
JRAS	Journal of Royal Asiatic Society
JSS	Journal of Semitic Studies
MEH	Medievalia Et Humanistica
MEJ	Middle East Journal
MLR	Modern Language Review
MW	The Muslim World
MWBR	Muslim World Book Review
NAR	North American Review
POC	Proche Orient Chretien

QR	Quarterly Review
RC	Race and Class
REI	Revue des Etudes Islamiques
RMES	Review of Middle Eastern Studies
RSO	Rivistadegli Studi Orientali
RT	Revue Thomiste
SI	Studia Islamica
SM	Studia Missionalia
TR	Table Ronde
URM	Ultimate Reality and Meaning
VOI	Voice of Islam
YIS	Yale Italian Studies

INTRODUCTION

THE TITLE OF THE THESIS.

The original title of the thesis was 'The Life of Muḥammad in Western scholarship' which has now narrowed down to the present focus on three key British scholars in the field of Orientalist scholarship on Islam in general and on the Sīrah in particular. The scholars are Sir William Muir, Professor David Samuel Margoliouth and Professor William Montgomery Watt.

The 'maturity' of the title to the present one has made it more manageable than the earlier rather ambitious title.

RATIONALE.

As a professional teacher, the type of material my students read should be of special concern for me. The type of material they handle and how they should be able to read between the lines and also positively discriminate among various scholars and see through their writings should form part of my major strategy in their training.

We are aware that books constitute an important barometer of the intentional and unintentional philosophy an author holds.

The subject 'Muḥammad' has a central place in most Western writings on Islam and certainly in the English-speaking Muslim world such books abound and their impact is incalculable. The subject matter was hence primarily selected with these in mind.

OBJECTIVE.

The thesis basically seeks to investigate some of the key English literature which dominate the field under study and see how their intentional and unintentional philosophies are surreptitiously passed on to their students.

We submit that Western images of Muḥammad have created a particular *Plebeia Opinio* which has matured into a sub-culture. These images have come out of the war psychosis of the Medieval times.

In an era of sound enlightened scholarship like ours, there is an urgent need that a serious 'unlearning' takes place so that the scientific method, which is supposed to hold the only promising future for the search for truth, could be applied as dispassionately as it is supposed to be. The thesis acknowledges a significant shift in style, and methodology as compared to the Medieval times, but it reiterates that there has been no meaningful change in attitude.

We seek to identify some of those Medieval polemical attitudes which continue to run through these dominant works.

A traditional African proverb says that 'The beard is younger than the eyebrow'. This is an intricate way of saying 'tradition reigns supreme'. However, in modern scholarship, serious questioning of the existing opinions is always called for. The effort we are making here is exactly because of this. Two major purposes are usually identifiable in scholarship:

a. To augment existing facet of human knowledge

b. To rectify certain mistakes made in previous studies.

Probably, in the field of Sīrah, we do not need new knowledge in *stricto sensu*. Hence, any knowledge we may attempt to put across may mainly be in the realm of the second imperative - to correct distortions made in earlier scholarship.

Writing in the epilogue of Okot p'Bitek's African Religions in Western Scholarship, ʿAlī Mazrui notes that:

> ... commitment to the correction of human error ... might involve purposive discrimination in terms of what is augmented in the pool of human information. And yet to correct error is as respectable an aim as to increase in knowledge . (see: p'Bitek, Okot: African Religions in Western Scholarship, (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, n.d.), p.123).

The thesis divides into six chapters which are put into two parts with three chapters in each part.

Chapter One looks at the Medieval European view of Muḥammad. This is done based on the hypothesis that the current attitudes have their roots from the Medieval war-propaganda period.

In Chapter Two, the works of Sir William Muir are critiqued with special emphasis on his biographical work on Muḥammad.

Chapter Three looks at David Samuel Margoliouth and his main book on Muḥammad.

The Fourth Chapter is a survey of literature in the twentieth century in order to set the context for a critique of William Montgomery Watt who forms the subject of the Fifth Chapter.

It could be observed that there is a rather great emphasis on Watt and his part takes a substantial portion of the thesis. This is inevitable primarily because, he is the only one out of the three who is alive and being a prolific writer, there is more material on him than Muir and Margoliouth. Hence, we allowed the material to dictate the length of discussion.

In each of these works the main books are painstakingly analysed identifying the favourite themes of each scholar. The choice of theme is a good pointer to a scholar's methodology and hence we have noted such issues which occupy the various attention pointing

out the rationale and critiquing them. In some cases we make observations on lacuna which have been either deliberately or unwittingly left.

Even though each chapter has a short conclusion, Chapter Six is set aside to present an overall appraisal. In this final Chapter, some observations are made regarding the study of religion in sound enlightened scholarship.

PART I

CHAPTER ONE

THE MEDIEVAL EUROPEAN VIEW OF MUḤAMMAD

The objective of this chapter is to examine the Medieval ages up to the seventeenth century seeking to present a survey of ideas in the then European world about Islam and Muḥammad and how these came to affect the cultural and intellectual basis upon which many later western scholars wrote. This, we believe, would enable us to have a proper critique of the later material on Muḥammad in the English West.

In order to make amends in our endless research for that seeming ideal 'objective scholarship', it is pertinent to look at the past to know where we went wrong. That, simply stated, is one of the main aims of the study of history. If we fail to recognize where we employed improper methodology in our study of a subject, then it will be difficult to arrive at real enlightenment. We will still be groping in the dark merely restating what some people thought was worth recording.

The Medieval writers, even those who had access to material on Muḥammad continuously preferred subjective material to objective ones. The thesis seeks to examine whether this problem of choosing negative material instead of those which objective scholarship provides has survived. One of the central questions is 'How far do modern Western writers on Muḥammad owe their attitude to Medieval legacy?'.

Some of the questions we will grapple with in the research are such as Waltz has asked:

> Why did the writers select some events as worthy of report and ignore others? and were their interpretations only personal or also representative of a considerable stratum or spectrum of society?[1]

Our object is also to explain that the Medieval writers were very selective in their choice of material while pointing out that there was no relationship of objectivity to material.

By looking at the Medieval age, we hold the opinion that we can tackle the issues better. It is this age, we are convinced, which gave a considerable impetus to later scholars in the West. It gave a "communal opinion", to use Norman Daniel's expression, which has survived the centuries.[2]

The hegemonic European always identifies his civilization as advanced, and superior while the oriental and other non-European civilizations are backward, lower and inferior.[3] The West has sincerely to question this inherent attitude. There must be an unlearning of this innate dominative mode.

The books that come out from the West on Islam and Muḥammad constitute an important barometer of the intentional and unintentional philosophy of its people. If yet another layer of ill-informed stereotyping about Muslims and Islam is to be excised, a critique of the nature we have set out to produce is necessary. The 'them and us' approach that characterises many a Western writer's approach is no more tenable.

If our main objective in history is "simply to show how it really was (*wie es eigentlich gewesen*)" as asserted by Von Ranke,[4] then we stand the risk of losing one of the most

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1 Waltz, J. "The significance of the voluntary Martyrs of Ninth century Corodoba", Muslim World 60 (1970), pp. 144-5.

2 Daniel, N. Islam and the West - The Making of an Image, (1980 reprint), see Chapter 9.

3 Said, E. Orientalism, p. 7.

important assets of humanity—freedom of thinking. This is because "how it really was" usually tends to be the way the earlier writer saw it.

Professor Barraclough has noted that "the history we read, though based on facts, is strictly speaking not factual at all, but a series of accepted judgements".[5] It is with this in view that we look at the "accepted judgements" of early Western writers which their progeny have depended upon when writing about Muḥammad. Antonie Wessels has surmised that:

> The task of understanding anew what it means in modern times to say that God spoke to or through Muḥammad, as we find reflected in the Qur'an, lies in my opinion, still ahead.[6]

The concern expressed here can some how be remedied if Western scholarship reassesses itself and shakes off the remnants of the ill-informed Medieval opinions on Muḥammad.

As Carr points out, it is an essential function of the student of history to master and understand the past "as a key to understanding the present".[7] The constant interplay of the past and the present is worthwhile and indeed necessary if we are to understand and make constructive progress in Sīrah scholarship in the West. The West needs to 'recreate' Muḥammd and this can best be done by looking at the past where the old image was moulded.[8]

The above remarks do not suggest that we do not intend touching on Muḥammad as a 'theological challenge' to the Western scholar. It is difficult to separate Muḥammad as a 'historical enigma' from a view of him as the 'theological enigma' that the West has to fully

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4 cited in Carr, E. H., What is History? (1985), p. 8.

5 cited in Ibid. p. 14.

6 Wessels, A., "Modern Biographies of Muḥammad in Arabic", Islamic Culture 49 (1975), p. 105.

7 Carr, What is History, p. 26.

8 Watt declares that Western scholars are " ... the heirs of a deep-seated prejudice which goes back to the 'war propaganda' of Medieval times".
see W. Montgomery Watt, What is Islam? (1968), p. 1 also p. 2.

grasp and unravel. Without this theological challenge, Muḥammad would have been considered in the West as a mere historical personality but it seems it is this theological aspect which created a lot of concern in the then establishment.

1.1 THE CHALLENGE OF ISLAM AND ATTEMPTS TO DEAL WITH IT.

Islam posed both a practical and theological challenge to the church in the Middle Ages. On the practical side, various options like crusade, conversion, coexistence and commercial exchange were open to deal with the problem. Theologically, Islam consistently called for answers to the multifarious questions it posed. Was it an indication of the prophesied eschatological era, another stage of Christian growth, a mere heresy, a separatist movement or a complete religion in its own right? Answers were difficult to come by.

The early vitality of Islam and the speed with which it achieved intellectual, social and economic momentum could hardly be rivalled in Western history. In terms of conquest, the picture was even more worrisome with Islam knocking at the doors of Germany after overrunning Byzantium and other states in its wake along the southern shores of the Mediterranean. Muḥammad could not be simply dismissed as' a storm in a tea cup.'
As Watt again writes:

> In deadly fear Christendom had to bolster confidence by placing the enemy in the most unfavourable light.[9]

The Medieval mind, with its tendency to portray the enemy as devilish and strange-looking was set to work. Non-sequitur inferences formed the grounds upon which

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9 Ibid.

overdrawn generalisations were made which brought in its trail wrong judgements supposed to be historical facts.

Character assassination became an honourable duty as long as it was against Muḥammad. The intellectual war on Muḥammad began in earnest. Daniel notes that

> ... the most probable explanation of what happened must be that Christians thought that whatever tended to harm the enemies of truth was likely itself to be true.[10]

Indeed, Guibert of Nogent admitted having no source for the work he produced on Muḥammad but he explained that

> It is safe to speak evil of the one whose malignity exceeds whatever ill can be spoken of.[11]

Commenting on this Southern writes:

> In a variety of forms, ... this rule inspired a great deal of writing in the first half of the twelfth century.[12]

Later students in the West have fallen on many of these as sacrosanct and immortalised them.

The situation which bred the opinions which have survived was such that

> Methodological acuity, reinvestigation and rigorous questioning are continually called for.[13]

In order to incite maximum hatred of Christians against Muḥammad and Islam, vile

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10 Islam and the West, p. 245.

11 Southern, R.W., Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages, (Cambridge (Mass): Harvard University Press, 1962), p. 31.

12 Ibid., pp. 31-32.

13 Royster, J.E. , "The study of Muḥammad: A Survey of approaches from the perspective of the history and phenomenology of religion" Muslim World 62 (1972), p. 56.

propaganda was initiated by the church authorities and taken up by others. For example:

> The anonymous author of the Gesta Francorum reported Corboran (Corborgha) as swearing 'by Muḥammad and all the gods' and his account was widely copied and served as basis for the histories written by Robert, Baldric, Guibert and others who repeated its statements.[14]

This also formed the foundation for the charge of idolatry made against Muslims. There was a story going round in the twelfth century that the archbishop Thiemo of Salzburg was martyred in 1104 A.D. because he destroyed an idol of the Muslims. Even though Otto Freising who showed some fair amount of knowledge of Islam, denied this idolatry charge and maintained that Muslims were strictly monotheistic while criticising the martyrdom policy of certain Christians, the story is indicative of how the mentality of the scholars worked. With a situation like this, the propensity to create more stories to make Muḥammad and Islam execrable could not be discounted.[15]

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14 Munro, D.C. "The Western attitude toward Islam during the period of the crusades" Speculum vi (1931), p. 332.

15 Discussing the relationship between Christendom and Islam in the Middle Ages, Helen Adolf, using Sir Winston's sophistication, writes " ... the barriers between the two worlds were formidable: differences of language and script, of race, climate, and manners of ideology, most of all - hence hot and cold war, which made it dangerous to symphathize - fear, hatred, prejudice, and an incredible amount of ignorance: the exact formula for an iron curtain".
see Helen Adolf: "Christendom and Islam in the Middle Ages, New Light on 'Grail Stone' and 'Hidden Host', Speculum 32 (1957), p. 105.

1.2 THE LEVELS OF MEDIEVAL THINKING ABOUT MUḤAMMAD

Perhaps we may be able to describe the events of the Medieval thinking about Muḥammad and Islam in three models. These may be on the same parallel as Southern's which divide the period into;

a) Age of Ignorance.

b) Age of Reason and Hope and

c) The moment of vision.[16]

Ours are based on certain 'logical' conclusions the West made about Islam even though the premises they used were faulty and suited the kind of objective they wanted them to achieve.

The first model consisted of the assumption that there was no truth outside the church. Christianity was 'the truth' and the truth was God therefore no truth (and hence God) lay outside Christianity. The only thing outside Christianity was the devil (the anti-God) and hence Islam was the work of the devil and Muḥammad inspired by him. With this line of thinking there was nothing about Islam to be accepted. Muḥammad was a false prophet, to them.

The second rests on the later Medieval scholars' premise that revelation lay in Christianity only. Since the Holy Qur'ān contained certain aspects of Judaic (Old Testament) and Christian (New Testament) teachings, it had some truth.

However, whatever truth it had was derivative and hence not absolute. Even though this position is more positive than the first, it is still less appreciative of Islam as a true religion worthy of any spirituality of its own. At best, it contained paganistic and heretical teachings.

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16 Southern, Western Views, passim.

The third is based on the contention of Islam as a philosophical system. It was argued that there were some evidence of reason in Islam. Nicholas of Cusa suggested that philosophy contained revelation and hence wherever there was philosophy there existed revelation. However, it was argued, the philosophy of Islam was not independent but recognized as wholly Greek. It was seen as derivative as well.[17]

Even though this represented an improvement on the second position and led to Seventeenth and eighteenth century enlightenment, the root of Islam - revelation, spirituality or the divine origin was, by implication, denied.

The main arguments against Muḥammad and Islam in the Medieval times were based on the Christian scripture and therefore nothing outside the scripture could be true. Whatever the Qur'ān said differently from the Bible, was, to them, wrong.

Muslim morals were not seen in themselves as independent entities but as either merely reinforcing or violating the Christian ones. The absolute authority of the church and the scripture was such that reason or natural law was no valid tool in examining any material especially those concerning Muḥammad. As late as 1889, S. W. Koelle maintained that:

> the religion of Christ presents the standard by which all other religions have to be judged[18]

Some of the difficult differences between Christianity and Islam around which most arguments centred were, as presented by Norman Daniel: the nature of revelation (God's method of revealing Himself to man), the nature of revelation through Christ and the nature of

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17 See: Hopkins, J., Nicholas of Cusa's Pace Fidei and Cribratio Alkorani (Translation and Analysis), (Minneapolis: The Arthur J. Banning Press, 1994), esp. The Prologue to the 'Cribratio Alkorani I', p. 79ff.
and: Biecher, J.E., 'Christian Humanism confronts Islam: Sifting the Qur'ān with Nicholas of Cusa' in JECS 13 (1976), pp. 1-14.

18 cited in Pike E. Royster, Mohammed, Prophet of the Religion of Islam, 1969, p. 54.

revelation through Muḥammad; the characteristics of prophethood, the question of trinity and the incarnation of the spirit of God.[19]

John of Damascus who spearheaded the Christian onslaught centred his argument on the nature of Godhead in Muslim thinking setting it out in a document which came to be a reference book for the Christian scholars.[20] He was bent on dismissing Muḥammad and what he saw as his invention - Islam.

Nicetas of Byzantium in his polemical work argued that since, to him, the God of Islam did not accept the Christian doctrines, He could not possibly be true and Muḥammad was not a true prophet after all.[21]

One of the greatest influences on Medieval scholars' thinking on Muḥammad was the converted Jew Pedro de Alfonso whose Dialogi, written between 1106 and 1110, was entirely polemical.

The twelfth century saw the West taking seriously the works on Islam and by the thirteenth and the mid-fourteenth centuries, there was a wide dissemination of literature on Muḥammad and Islam.

Fables then came to be invented to discredit the man with some of them still popular today - for example the pathological theory. Muḥammad was seen as an epileptic who, whenever he had the seizure, had to explain to his wife Khadījah that an angel had come upon him. This, and other legends gained much currency and little thought was spared for their credulity. Guibert of Nogent, Waltherius, Alexandre du Pont, Sigebert of Gembloux, Ricoldo

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19 Daniel, Islam and the West, p. 1.

20 Ibid., pp. 3-4.

21 Daniel describes this work as " ... less febrile but inclined to a niggling pettiness in a dialectical subtlety that one would suppose could convince nobody, at least of all a Muslim", Ibid., p. 5.

da Monte Croce and San Pedro, all in Medieval Christian times scholars of no mean repute, used this theory in their work.[22]

This theory has survived the ravages of time. Frank R. Freeman, a neurosurgeon of Nashville (U.S.A.) in a recent article, 'A Differential Diagnosis of the Inspirational Spells of Mohammed, the Prophet of Islam', gives a 'scientific' justification for it. He claims that the most reasonable explanation to Muḥammad's conditions is

> ... psychomotor or complex partial seizures of temporal lobe epilepsy ...

even though, as he readily admits, the findings

> ... are unproven and forever unprovable.[23]

One could discern from the stories that they were meant to ridicule Muḥammad and not a conscious education though most often both results were achieved.

On the question of idolatry, the Crusades were fought with this whipped-up enthusiasm and emotions that the Christians were fighting the idolaters who had usurped the holy lands. The church used the recruitment as an acid-test for the true Christian belief and the propaganda was couched in a language most appealing. The Crusades were 'divinely backed holy wars' which offered absolution from sins. That was why those who could not serve at the war fronts induced death at Muslim hands to become martyrs. The Spanish Martyrs Movement was born principally for this[24]

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22 See a comprehensive discussion of this theory in Arthur Jeffery's articles "The Quest of the Historical Moḥammed" The Moslem World vol. xxvi (October 1926), no. 4, pp. 335-6 where the survival of the concept is discussed.

23 See his article in Epilepsia 17 (1976)
Syed Aḥmad Khān has given this topic an exhaustive analysis pointing out that Gibbon and Davenport have traced it to the doors of Greek superstition.
See: Khān, Sir Syed Ahmad: The Life of Muḥammad and Subjects Subsidiary Thereto, Lahore, 1979, reprint, pp. 196-199.

24 Arnold says of the Martyrs as " ... a fanatical party ... which set itself openly and unprovokenly to insult

Peter the venerable was ,however, bold to write that Muḥammad changed the Arabs

> away from idolatry, yet not to one God, but... to the error of his own heresies."[25]

Stories like the dove which was trained by Muḥammad to pick grain from his ear to signify reception of revelation, and the bull with written documents in its horns as revelation were all part of the machinery to destroy the credibility of the prophet. Since their objective was to denigrate and not to appreciate, they went every inch to achieve this.

Pedro de Alfonso gave three main criteria of a true prophet as:

> ... probity of life, the presentation of miracles, and the constant truth in all his sayings.[26]

In all these, to him, Muḥammad never measured up to the standard. The fact that the Qur'ān testified to Muḥammad as not a miracle worker was a good reason for their scorn.

In the Medieval ages, miracles constituted the symbol of divine authority and hence it was unimaginable for a law-giving prophet to have no express miracles to back him up.

This was a favourite theme and achieved a lot of prominence in the eighteenth century. It was held up as a means to prove the authenticity of the Christian faith against Islam.

John Locke stated that miracles were "the credentials of a messenger delivering a divine religion"[27] and hence the revelation in Christianity was proved beyond every reasonable doubt

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the religion of Muslims and blaspheme their prophet, with the deliberate intention of incurring death by such misguided assertion of their Christian bigotry".
See Arnold, T.W. The Preaching of Islam, (1913), p. 141.
See also Arthur Jeffery, Ibid., p. 331.
See also Waltz, J, 'The significance of the Voluntary Martyrs of Ninth Century Cordoba.

25 Daniel, Islam and the West, p. 42.

26 Ibid., p. 68.

27 Locke, J., A Discourse on Miracles, (London, 1768), p. 226.

by the constant use of miracles by Jesus. Muḥammad was therefore scoffed at for impliedly, disproving his own authenticity.

Richard Simon is noted to have also written that "They who introduce a new religion ought to shew some miracles".[28] Since the conclusion had already been made, the Christian apologists only needed all arguments to reinforce their case. They hence rejected the miracle of the *Isrā'* and *Mi'rāj* as not satisfying one of the cardinal criteria for sanctioning miracles - that is: Its public nature. They argued that a miracle must necessarily be in public and hence the case of the *Isrā'* and *Mi'rāj* was not admissible since it was a private encounter.

Humphrey Prideaux even rejected the whole issue of *Isrā'* and *Mi'rāj* as a fabrication merely to meet the popular demands of the public and George Sale thought it was invented merely to enhance the Prophet's reputation.[29]

As for the point that the unique inimitable nature of the Qur'ān should be an ultimate miracle in favour of Muḥammad that was also rejected on the grounds that, as Robert Jenkins put it, it was "false, absurd and Immoral".[30]

The few who were able to identify some miracles in the life of Muḥammad which they could have used to rebut the arguments rather turned the whole issue in another way accusing Muḥammad as being a magician. Henry Smith, in his God's Arrow Against Atheists contended that Muḥammad was "thoroughly instructed in Satans schoole, and well seine in Magicke".[31]

The logical reasoning was framed in such a way that room was left only for the

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28 Cited in Pailin, D.A., Attitudes to other Religions - Comparative Religion in Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Britain, (Manchester, 1984), p. 311, footnote 54.

29 See Ibid., footnote 58.

30 Ibid., p. 312, footnote 65.

31 Ibid., p. 311.

Christian case and none else. As seen in the words of Pailin, the contention was:

> Maḥomet claimed to bring messages from God; divine revelations are backed by miracles - the Bible shows this; Mahomet produced no trustworthy miracles; therefore his claim must be false.[32]

Of course, miracles have their place in the Islamic tradition as an authenticating evidence of prophethood. Islam recognizes the miracles of earlier prophets as valid but only on the understanding that it is solely within the permission of God that they occur.

If wondrous events were employed merely to fascinate people to believe in one's mission, that might properly be categorised as magic instead.

There is the natural propensity for man to believe in the marvellous as pointing to something very true hence the demand. Since miracles could not be induced because they are wrought only with the permission of God, miracles *per se* do not prove the authenticity or otherwise of a prophet.

The detractors of Muḥammad were not in the mood for rational arguments. Answers must always agree with what they were harbouring in their subconscious.

The Prophet's sexual life also became a dominant theme of attack because of the Medieval philosophical and theological notion that sex and holiness were incompatible. Reference was constantly made to Aristotle who asserted that of all human senses, touch, especially the type through sex was the most bestial.[33] The sheer number of his wives caused opprobrium in the Christian West and the tradition attributed to him that he liked "unguent, women and prayer" most was repeatedly referred to, sometimes omitting the prayer altogether.

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32 Ibid., p. 89.
33 See: Aristotle Ethics iii.x.8.

Pailin cites Robert Jenkins who saw Muḥammad as 'lustful, proud, fierce and cruel' while Jacob Bryant thought the Prophet was 'false, treacherous, blasphemous' and 'the bane of all happiness'.[34]

The issue of polygamy therefore became a favourite topic. The force of such arguments is seen in the work of Sir William Muir as late as the last part of the nineteenth century. He wrote:

> By uniting himself to a second wife Muḥammad made a serious movement away from Christianity, by the tenets and practice of which he must have known that polygamy was forbidden.[35]

The 'Christian' principle against polygamy itself seems to be a legacy from Western cultural thought instead of a clear Biblical doctrine.[36]

The apologists and polemicists failed to see Muḥammad's life as being in tune with the reality of human need. They discussed the marriage life of the Prophet and criticised the permission for Muslims to marry more than one as if it was a religious duty. They were obviously not prepared to listen to any explanation that the provision is an exception. Thomas Carlyle also gives a thought to the issue of the charge of profligacy against Muḥammad and points out that people completely overlook the fact that he (Muḥammad) lived with Khadija alone until her death and took wives after the heat of his age was gone - after he had passed his prime.[37]

The Prophet's roots also became a centre of ridicule. The Arabian peninsula of his days was said to be peopled by pagan Arabs and heretical Jews and Christians (Nestorians and

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34 Pailin, D.A., Attitudes to Other Religions, p. 91.

35 Muir, W., The Life of Mohammed from Original Sources, (London, 1858-61), p. 202. See also: Cook, M., Muḥammad, Past Master Series, (Oxford & New York, 1983), p. 49-50.

36 John Davenport has looked at this charge of polygamy and immorality in detail in his An Apology for Moḥammed and the Koran, (London, 1869) (see the Lahore reprint 1975, pp. 151-161).

37 See Carlyle, T., On Heroes, Hero Worship and the Heroic in History, (New York, 1849), p. 53.

Jacobites). The Arabs were described as "rough, uneducated simple men easy to seduce and fleshy"[38] an image very often carried by Muslims to show how the advent of Muḥammad changed the situation. The Medieval scholars however, used the material differently contending that nothing good could come from such a society; an argument which is of course a theological as well as a historical fallacy. The Christian scriptures contain evidence that good, holymen and prophets arose from sinful nations.

With so many Christian heretics around, nothing could be more appealing to the public than to suggest that Muḥammad was actually taught by some of these; hence names like Bahira and Sergius were bandied about as the protégés of Muḥammad responsible for his 'heresy'.[39]

Interpretation of the revelation in Daniel 7:23 -25 pointed at Islam and Muḥammad as the king due to arise to subdue the three kings of the existing empires - the Greek, the Frank and the Goth. Muḥammad was the Anti-Christ, a picture of the apocalyptic verses was seen in Islam and Muḥammad.[40]

Muḥammad's tremendous successes were at best attributed to the devil but they failed to question how the devil could be so successful for so long. Questions like this would have disturbed the objective to be achieved.

Fra Fidenzio believed that Muḥammad used oppressive methods to achieve his aims and thence surrounded himself with evil men, thieves, plunderers, fugitives, murderers and such likes ready to kill, plunder and liquidate every community that refused to follow him.[41] This charge of violence still exists in the West though a blind eye is turned to whatever Christianity

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38 Daniel, Islam and the West, p. 82.

39 See Nicholas of Cusa's opinion in: Hopkins: Nicholas of Cusa's Pace Fidei and Cribratus AlKorani, p.79ff.

40 See Southern, Western Views, pp. 23-24, and Arthur Jeffery, 'The Quest', pp. 343-344.

41 Daniel, Islam and the West, p. 92.

perpetrated; that was, to them, obviously done to 'defend the truth'. The battle of Uhud was used as a classic evidence that Muḥammad had no divine guidance as if neither Badr nor any other battle was fought at all.

Even the death of Muḥammad became interesting with various theories ranging from the poisoned lamb shoulder effect as held by San Pedro, Vitry, James of Acqui and others through the notion by Allan of Lille that Muḥammad was eaten by dogs, to probably the most widely circulated; his death at the hands of swines, were rife. The latest was possibly suggested by Guibert of Nogent and even the corozoan texts believed it.

Gerald of Wales is referred to as maintaining that

> since he (Muḥammad) taught uncleanness and shame, it was by pigs, which are considered unclean animals, that he was devoured.[42]

The question then is why should the church fathers stoop so low, neglecting every possible ethical prudence in Christianity to maintain such views about Muḥammad and Islam, very well aware of the fact that they were mostly a pack of lies, farcical or wilful manipulation of material?

Perhaps, due to their polemical method, good material was not judged by its type and origin but by the way it could be arranged and presented. It was not the argumentative spirit found within it which was important but whether it could be twisted well enough to fit the objective -- intellectual war on Muḥammad.

The thirteenth century English philosopher Roger Bacon saw war as a hopeless medium of defeating Islam and therefore preferred miracles and philosophy and since the former

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[42] Cited in Ibid., p. 104.
These stories may seem stupid to us but the damage done to the image of Muhammad was such that remnants still remain.
See Southern, Western Views, pp. 31-32.

(miracles) were no more existing in the church, philosophical argument was the only option left. This led to the Council of Vienna in 1312 accepting the need to establish centres for Semitic languages in European cities. This never took off and the old attitudes survived.[43]

Between 1450 and 1460, the resurgent Islam was the greatest problem for John of Segovia, Nicolas of Cusa, Jean Germain and Aeneas Silvius. John's concern was to prove that the Qur'ān was not the word of God but admitted that the existing Christian material were not very helpful due to mistranslations.[44]

Rejecting war and preaching, he suggested '*contraferentia*' a term sometimes translated as 'conference',[45] but in reality it means 'confrontational dialogue' to convert Muslims.

To Nicolas of Cusa, the problem of Islam was merely that between Western and Nestorian Christianity since Muḥammad was nurtured by the latter. Jean Germain, however, stuck to the war option and cried for resumption of the Crusades. The goals and plans to achieve them differed but it seems common sense and some amount of reason was being preferred to speculations and useless xenophobia.

However, as the centuries went by, writers merely continued with the tradition and even those who were supposed to be well informed could not distinguish authentic from false sources always showing their preference for the most mediocre.

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43 See Southern: Western Views, pp. 72-73.

44 Munro speaks of Peter the Venerable's translation of the Qur'ān as " ... unfortunately very inaccurate and full of errors; but it was the only one known in the West until the end of the seventeenth century". See Munro, 'Western Attitude towards Islam in the period of the Crusades', p. 337.
Helen Adolf also confirms that "most facts about Moḥammad were known, through the Byzantine historians, through Peter the Venerable and his Koran translators in Toledo..." See Adolf, 'Christendom and Islam', p. 105.

45 See Southern, Western Views, pp. 91-92.
Also cited in Said, Orientalism, p. 61.

Daniel puts it succinctly that:

> To read San Pedro and Ibn Isḥāq side by side is to be given a striking lesson in the way the same material can be used in order to give totally different impressions.[46]

For example, after a lengthy discussion of the Bahīra story, Shabo deduces that Muslims tell the story with apologetic reasons to prove Muḥammad's prophethood while the Christians with al-Kindī as a typical example, refer to the story to disprove exactly that showing Bahīra as a heretical Nestorian. Here, it is used polemically. Yet again, the Nestorians, Shabo argues, used the story to secure themselves a place under Muslim rule since the parent church had excommunicated them.[47] This is not the place to discuss the validity or otherwise of any of these presumptions but they further illustrate how people with different objectives can manipulate the same material.

The hidden agenda behind the writers' works was to prove that Muḥammad was mere human with no divine intervention ever in his life and hence could not be a prophet. Since the recipient of a divine message was to be totally different, aspects of his life which showed him as ordinary were further proofs of his falsity.[48]

Honestly, the Medieval Christians were faced with the enormous dilemma of Islam. It was winning souls and lands from the church and culminating with the Crusades which, to them, was a Muslim aggression instead of the opposite which was true to the Muslims, they had to marshal every means of defending the church from gradual waning of power and influence and probably demise. Therefore, when such 'a menace' was no more felt in Western

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46 Daniel, Islam and the West, p. 237.

47 See: Shabo, A.M., 'An Evaluative study of the Bahīra story in the Muslim and Christian Traditions', unpublished M.A. Thesis, Dept. of Theology, University of Birmingham (U.K.), 1984.

48 Ibid., p. 245.

Europe in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries so acutely, the tone against Muḥammad and Islam became watered down considerably.[49]

We are under no illusion, however, that with the changes in tone and methodology, the average Western scholar's view of Muḥammad's life has reached a level of satisfaction to Muslims and probably even to real dispassionate academic study. This is because, change in methodology *per se* does not necessarily entail change in attitude. The human touch, the personal experience of Muslims and Muslim societies, is what most Western scholars miss to their peril.

Montgomery Watt concedes that though efforts have been initiated to change the distorted image of Muḥammad inherited by Western scholars of the present age, the opinions are so endemic that success is difficult to be achieved.[50]

It is precisely due to statements like these made by eminent scholars from the West that the need to re-examine the image of Muḥammad in the Medieval ages becomes more vital. If more and more people are able to realise that much of the present Western material on Muḥammad carries reminiscences of that age when the Western scholars and the church were obsessed with carving out a holy identity over and against Islam and hence revelled in pure speculation, then we will be making a major headway towards balancing the scales. We would be helping in putting readers into the real picture of Muḥammad the prophet of Islam.

Even though certain academics may argue that the way Muslims see and regard Muḥammad should not necessarily be the same way others see or think about him, in matters of

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49 Rodinson has a good analysis of many of these issues. See his: Europe and the Mystique of Islam, translated from the French by Roger Veinus, (London: I.B. Tauris, 1988). See esp. pp. 3-40.

50 Watt, W. Montgomery, "Western Historical scholarship and the Prophet of Islam", Message of the Prophet, a series of articles read at the First International Congress on Seerat, 1979, pp. 70-71. See also his What is Islam?, pp. 1-2.

scholarship, we are not aware of any other methodology more dangerous than pure speculation and wilful distortion of material.

Western writers share certain basic presuppositions and as students of Islam and Muḥammad, we feel duty-bound to examine these and expose those based on ill-informed sources and views. The roots as we have referred to now and again, lie in the Medieval times hence our going back is worthwhile and indeed inevitable.[51]

In the following chapter, the work of Sir William Muir on Muḥammad is critiqued.

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[51] See: Trude Ehlert's article on 'Muhammad' in: The Encyclopaedia of Islam, New Edition, Vol. VII, pp. 360-387. Section 3 of the article deals with 'The Prophet's Image in Europe and the West'. The author also provides a very helpful list of Western sources on Muḥammad from the 8th. to the 19th. century.

CHAPTER TWO

SIR WILLIAM MUIR

2.1 OBJECTIVE OF THE CHAPTER AND ITS RATIONALE.

This is a critical review of Sir William Muir's work on the Life of Muḥammad which aims to assess his contribution to the development of the image of Muḥammad in Western scholarship which our thesis seeks to critique.

We chose Muir as our starting point in the nineteenth century Western scholarship primarily because it was the largest undertaken in that century.

Secondly, it was among the first in English to base itself on original Arabic sources. Alfred Von Kramer accuses European scholars of not

> ...treating the history of Muhammad according to the principles of a sound enlightened criticism.[1]

He charges the Western scholar of hiding behind supposed unavailability of original source - material to rely on orientalist material of very modern age discarding the ancient Arabic originals. Indeed, he says, in the West, the reader on Muḥammad

> ...prefers the wonderful tales of late compilers to the simple and manly style of an old Arabic chronicler.[2]

The acceptability of Muir's work as the *sine qua non* source - book on Muḥammad in the West is evident from the way many later writers constantly refer to it. It was supposed to be a wide shift from the medieval age polemics and hatred.

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1 A Von Kramer (ed.), History of Muhammad's Campaigns by Aboo Abdallah Mohammad Omar Al-Wāqidy (1856), p. 1.

2 Ibid., p. 2.

For these reasons, it was widely acclaimed for 'objectivity' by many who quickly acknowledged it as

> the standard presentment in English, of the career of the prophet of Islam.[3]

Lyall goes on to describe it as full of 'excellences', 'systematic' and has 'sobriety of judgement' but admits that it

> ...is marked with a polemic character which necessarily render it in some degree antipathetic to those who profess the religion of Muhammad.[4]

Therefore to test our hypothesis that traces of Medieval attitude to Muḥammad became a heritage for the West and lasted into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Muir's work cannot be bypassed.

We will attempt to analyse critically his assessment of Muḥammad locating evidence of fairness and objectivity whilst also noting indications of prejudice, bias, and other aspects of inappropriate scholarship.

We are also on the lookout for any traces of Medieval style of approach to Muḥammad. Some of the basic questions we may endeavour to answer are:

a. How far does Muir's explicit commitment to the Christian church and Christian mission as well as British Raj influence his appraisal of Muḥammad's life?

b. Has his Western orientation kept him in line with his medieval forefathers?

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3 Lyall, C.J.: "Obituary of Sir William Muir" in Journal of Royal Asiatic Society, (1905), p. 876.

4 Ibid., p. 877.

c. How honest has Muir been in seeking to penetrate the life of Muḥammad. a man whose image had been so maligned in the West prior to his age.?

d. Moreover, has the fundamental change in methodology assured any shift in attitude.?

These, and many other offshoots of these questions will be discussed as we move along in the critique.

2.2 MUIR'S METHODOLOGY.

He begins his book, in the introduction, with an exhaustive discussion of the main sources of material for the biography of Muḥammad. He identifies legends, tradition and actual historical records as the three avenues through which the early biographers compiled their work. He correctly points out that:

> Tradition and the rhapsodies of bards have, for their object actual or supposed events; but the impression of these events is liable to become distorted from the imperfection of the vehicle which conveys them.[5]

We share his observation with regard to the problems oral tradition is prone to be fraught with. He however acknowledges that Muslim oral tradition is of a different standard from every other and believes that there is a lot of authentic recorded material about Muhammad through this medium.

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5 Muir, Life, p. xiii.

At this point, we think it is apposite to cite Margoliouth's statement concerning the same topic. He says,

> With us, the natural seat of a book is some material such as paper: It may or may not be committed to memory. With the Arab, the natural seat of a book is the memory: It may or may not be committed to writing. In the Qur'an, there are indications that the seat of the book is regarded as the memory, not withstanding the importance which is therein attached to writing.[6]

The philosophy behind the Arab thinking is that the message written in the hearts and minds of men is difficult or impossible to remove. Even though the generalities of the statement could be open to serious debate, the underlying basic assumption is there, that; to the Arabs, it is the safest and best means of recording and retaining material.

The genuine logical concern Muir expresses in his analysis of the traditions are issues we cannot refute. There is enough evidence already to prove that spurious traditions were perpetrated by probably not totally dishonest people in *stricto sensu* - but by zealous people. The example of Bukhārī's method of collection in which several thousands were rejected gives us a classic case in point.

Muir, in his endeavour to satisfy academic scholarship, subjects the early biographers to scrutiny looking at each and his time of writing and the likely encumbrances affecting his work. The period of the Abbāsid Caliph al - Māmūn (198 - 218 A.H.) with its attendant theological problems was the very era in which three great biographers al- Wāqidī, Ibn Hishām, and al - Madanī wrote. Ibn Isḥāq wrote under the Caliphate of the first two Abbāsid rulers. We cannot question the fact that the problems of the age might have had profound consequences for the material from which they compiled their work.

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6 Margoliouth, D.S.: Lectures on Arab Historians Lecture 1, p. 3.

However, standing on this premise, Muir gets a weapon to wield against any material that to him, appears suspicious. After referring to the existence of ḥadīth criticism, he advises the European reader to be wary because the method was not rigorous and credible enough. Even though he admits some "guarantee of sincerity", he suspects that the floodgates of speculation, error, exaggeration and pure fiction were flung wide open.[7]

The enormous gravity of the problem of hadith in academic scholarship is recognized by many scholars and indeed Muir highlights it. He recognizes the dilemma in the following words:

> The biographer of Muhammad continuously runs the risk of substituting for the realities of history some puerile fancy, or extravagant invention. In striving to avoid this danger, he is exposed to the opposite peril of rejecting as pious fabrication what may in reality be important historical fact.[8]

Of course, due to particular interests of specific groups, be they believers or unbelievers, members of the prophet's household or ordinary people outside his immediate family, close associates and others, some element of suspicion is almost always justified when dealing with material from them.

Because of this fundamental assumption, Muir reasons that unfavourable traditions against Muḥammad might be true because, the scholar argues, they could not have survived if they were not true. In fact, this is not a new view and scholars like Sprenger, Grimme, Weil, and later Goldziher and Schacht have used the same argument. Muir was certainly familiar with the works of some of these who were his own contemporaries and predecessors.

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7 Muir, Life, pp. xliii-xliv.
8 Ibid., p. xlviii.

Though Muir cautions us against a universal application of this hypothesis, we see he himself treating it so. We are of the opinion that by the same contention of interest groups, unfavourable statements would likely have been creations of later generations.

Muhammad Asad reflecting on this question of authenticity of hadith writes:

> The fact that there were numberless spurious ahadith did not in the least escape the attention of the Muhaddithun, as European critics naively seem to suppose. On the contrary, the critical science of hadith was initiated by the necessity of discerning between authentic and spurious,... The existence, therefore, of false ahadith does not prove anything against the system of hadith as a whole - no more than a fanciful tale from the 'Arabian Nights' could be regarded as an argument against the authenticity of any historical report of the corresponding period.[9]

After a fair amount of deliberation on the works of earlier biographers, Muir states that those of Ibn Hishām, al - Wāqidī, (as seen from his scribe Ibn Sa'd) together with at - Ṭabarī form the tripod of original sources upon which any biography of Muhammad could conveniently be based. He recognizes al - Bukhārī, Muslim and at - Ṭirmīdhī as supportive authorities.

Muir then advises the student of the *Sīra* to reject any other material outside these sources, hence, slamming the door in the face of other sources he does not favour.

The reader detects in Muir, a struggle to portray the falsity of Muḥammad's claims. In certain cases his language is bitter and could probably be interpreted as insulting.

His thesis in the preliminary discussions that whatever story puts Muḥammad in bad light must be true and the otherwise is false or at best suspect, is directing him in his interpretation of events in Muḥammad's life. Muir's intimation of Christianity as a 'purer faith'[10] in itself constrains him and this is where we find certain aspects of his methodology wanting.

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9 Muhammad Asad: Islam at the Crossroads, pp. 127-8.

10 See: Muir: Life, p. Li.

He uses basic Western historical methodology which involves deep sceptical approach to history. This method we believe, in the context of religion usually obfuscates the real identity of the subject under study. We see this in the works on the quest for the historical Jesus.

Hamilton Gibb has pointed out that Islam

> is an autonomous expression of religious thought and experience, which must be viewed in and through its own principles and standards.[11]

2.3 SELECTED THEMES.

2.3.1 PRE - MUHAMMADAN MAKKAH - BIRTH, AND CHILDHOOD OF MUḤAMMAD

Muir, as it is with many other Islamicists, notes the enormous religious, social and political difficulties existing in Arabia which needed solution. He is of the opinion that these problems were solved by Muḥammad through several tactics including "war" and "plunder" which the "wild Arabs" found irresistible.[12]

He acknowledges, however, that Christianity and Judaism as they existed in the sixth and seventh centuries in Arabia could not tackle the problems. He writes:

> "The material for a great change was here. But it required to be wrought; and Muhammad was the workman.[13]

What Muir finds difficult to credit Muḥammad with is that this extraordinary skill which he employed to solve the problems of the "wild" people comes from outside himself.

The old notion that Muḥammad borrowed most of his thoughts from Judaism and Christianity reappears in order to deny him any original spirituality in his mission.[14]

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11 H.A.R. Gibb: Mohammedanism (1962), p. vi.

12 Muir: Life, p. xciv.

13 Ibid., p. xcviii.

14 See Ibid., p. xcvii and pp.197-203.
Also: The Sources of Islam, a Persian treatise by the Rev. W. St. Clair-Tisdall, (1901),esp. Chpts. 3 & 4.

This surviving idea in the West of copying by Muḥammad cannot be conclusively proved. The main question is perhaps that if the source of revelation is one and the same (that is God), what prevents the source to reveal to Muḥammad concepts similar to those that exist in earlier scriptures?

Indeed the Holy Qur'an itself states and Muslims believe that the revelation vouchsafed to Muḥammad confirm the essence of the earlier ones.[15]

Muir subscribes to the pathological theory and that of auto - suggestion. He describes the event which occurred to Muḥammad in his early childhood when living with Halīmah as evidence of epileptic fits.[16] It is interesting to note that Muslim pious writings have explained this incident of opening of Muḥammad's chest as cleansing of the heart by angels. There is indeed no authentic evidence that Muḥammad in his pre - prophetic life experienced anything that can be alluded to fits.

Emile Dermenghem appropriately writes:

> Neurotics, false mystics and authentic visionaries present certain phenomena in common. The one is purely passive; the other active and creative. At the most we might say that the morbid tendency may facilitate trances which, in their turn, would increase the tendency. But one finds no traces, as it seems, of this pathological state in Mahomet.[17]

Syed Ahmad Khan has given this topic a careful and exhaustive analysis.[18] He looks at the text of Ibn Hishām and points out that Muir has made a serious error of judgement and interpretation. The Arabic quotation and its English translation carries no idea of epileptic fits.

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15 For example: see Holy Qur'an 2:41, 89, 97; 3:3; 4:47; 5:48; and passim.

16 Life, pp. 6-7.

17 Emile Dermenghem: The Life of Mahomet (1930), trans. by Arabella Yorke, pp.251-2.

18 Khan, Sir Syed Ahmad: Life of Muhammad and Subjects Subsidiary Thereto, (1979) Reproduction, p. 196.

The argument then centres on the Latin rendering of the Arabic text giving Amina's reaction when Muḥammad was returned to her.

Amina was supposed to have asked:

> Ah didst thou fear that he was under the influence of evil spirit?[19]

Dr. Pockocke in his Latin translation used the expression

> "hypochondrium contraxerit"

during his work on parts of Abul Fidā's material in 1723. This expression in Latin then suggests epilepsy or falling sickness.

In the original text of Ibn Hisham, the word which Muir misreads and misinterprets is *Usīb* which in classical Arabic means simply 'afflicted' and does not in Arabic usage imply epilepsy.[20]

Syed Ahmad Khan asks

> When, then could such a notion have originated, and by whom was it encouraged and propagated?[21]

He finds the answer from Gibbon and Davenport who lay the origin of this interpretation at the doors of Greek superstition.[22]

Even though Gibbon had debunked the idea and given the origin of the notion, Muir, who must have known Gibbon's works, uncritically accepts the ongoing tradition. Muir seems

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19 Ibid., p. 196.

20 E.W. Lane: An Arabic Lexicon, (1980), p. 1739 ff. esp. p. 1740. Here, there is a detailed analysis of the word with the general notion being 'affliction' or 'calamity'.

21 Khan: Life, p. 196.

22 Ibid., pp. 198-199, see also: Gibbon: The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, (1923), Vol. 5, p. 373.

to have fallen prey to existing notions of misrepresented facts without checking their authenticity. The symptoms of epilepsy which medical evidence gives us and the historical testimony of the robust health of Muḥammad stand in sharp contradiction and disprove the theory.

2.3.2 YOUTH TO PROPHETHOOD.

Despite the epilepsy problem as Muir sees it, Muḥammad is described in the book as being

> Endowed with a refined mind and delicate taste, reserved and meditative, he lived much within himself, and the ponderings of his heart no doubt supplied occupation for leisure hours spent by others of a lower stamp in rude sports and profligacy.[23]

Such a description does not fit an epileptic.

He does not dispute the possibility that Muḥammad might have met some monks on his Syrian journeys and might have discussed matters with them or listened to them but he calls it ridiculous and puerile the idea that he met Nestorius.[24]

Perhaps the rejection of this idea is not because the two could not have met, but he does so merely to fit his larger design to refute any suggestion that a certain monk of high status pronounced Muḥammad prophet.

Further, he reiterates that Christianity as it existed at that time in Syria and its environs was not pure and that if Muḥammad had encountered pure Christianity, he would have become a Christian.[25]

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23 Muir: Life, pp. 19-20.
24 Of course Nestorius himself died in about 451 A.D., about 120 years before the birth of Muḥammad.
25 Muir: Life, p. 21.

He then continues that:

> We may well mourn that the misnamed Catholicism of the empire thus grievously misled the mastermind of the age, and through him eventually so great a part of the eastern world.[26]

Muḥammad's visitations to the cave of Ḥirā are reduced to mere events of self - contemplation and a period in which he

> ...would give vent to his agitation in wild rhapsodical language, enforced often with incoherent oaths, the counterpart of inward struggle after truth.[27]

Due to his insistence on the auto - suggestion theory, Muir finds it impossible to accept that the change in Muḥammad's life signified true prophethood. He remarks that:

> How such aspirations developed into belief that the subject of them was divinely inspired, is a theme obscure and difficult.[28]

2.3.3 PROPHETHOOD IN MAKKAH

In the whole volume, Muir appears sympathetic to the cause of Muḥammad at least in Makkah. He, however, sticks to purely psychological interpretation of Muḥammad's mission and hence sees him as not receiving messages from outside himself but that it was his subconscious which was at work. He grapples with the problem of reconciling this theory and the well - known fact of a divine presence behind his utterances.

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26 Ibid., p. 22.
27 Ibid., p. 38.
28 Ibid.

He argues that:

> It is certain that the conception of the Almighty as the immediate source of his inspiration and author of his commission, soon took entire and undivided possession of his soul; and however coloured by the events and inducements of the day, or mingled with apparently incongruous motives and desires, retained a paramount influence until the hour of his death.[29]

There seems to be a contradiction here because in Islam it will be strange that a prophet whose life is fully in the hands of Allah would lapse into a situation where he looks for secular ends only. This might cast a great doubt on the whole question of divine guidance itself.

Muir, however, unwittingly admits Muḥammad's sincerity. Looking at the upright character of the earliest converts and the social standing of his close friends and members of his household, he writes, these

> "could not fail otherwise to have detected those discrepancies which ever more or less exist between the professions of the hypocritical deceiver abroad and his actions at home.[30]

Again, he looks at Abu Ṭālib who even though did not embrace Islam put his honour and even life at stake in defence of Muḥammad. This could not have been out of mere family relationship, he agrees, and concludes that

> They afford at the same time strong prove of the sincerity of Muhammad. Abu Talib would not have acted thus for an interested deceiver; and he had ample means of scrutiny.[31]

From these, therefore, we could detect Muir's rejection of the notion of Muḥammad's imposture even though he does not state it and in fact later discussions stand to deny this.

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29 Ibid., p. 47.
30 Ibid., p. 55.
31 Ibid., p. 106.

Sir William Muir finds the incident of the so - called satanic verses interesting and refers to the issue.[32]

He sees the root of the problem from the troubled self of Muḥammad who finds it difficult to reconcile the Ka'ba as the house of God and used by the Makkan for their idols and his message of only one God. He contends that Muḥammad, in order to resolve the issue and win over the people to the worship of one true God, had to make some compromises hence his statement implicitly accepting the power and efficacy of the idols.

From the earlier admission of Muḥammad's strong stand against idolatry, how he will consciously bend over and therefore revoke the whole basis of his mission is a very difficult issue to handle.

Syed Ahmad Khan, making references to seventeen sources, discusses this question in extenso analysing the traditions upon which the story is founded.

For Muir, the incident is well supported by the traditions and here he refers to Ibn Hishām, Ibn Sa'd and at - Ṭabarī. After his thorough analysis of the traditions, Syed Ahmad Khan rejects as spurious the tradition upon which Muir and others have built their story.[33]

He points out that the portion that was supposed to be upholding the idols was an interpretation by one of the idolators standing around who anticipated that Muḥammad was going to rain insults on their gods judging from the way the passage had begun. However, since the culprit was not found out, it was concluded by Muslims that at least, whoever did it was at the instigation of Satan.[34]

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32 Ibid., pp. 80-86.

33 Khan: <u>Life</u>, pp. 317-332.

34 Ibid., pp. 328-329.

Syed Ahmad Khan argues further that since the story gained currency, it was referred to by certain scholars and in the same way that some scholars have recorded spurious traditions, this one also found its way into the books. He then observes that

> Sir William Muir's experience as a literary man of the first class, ought, most assuredly, to have taught him that mere assertions, unsupported by argument and by proofs, ever recoil to the destruction of the very purpose they were intended to subserve.[35]

Syed Ameer ʿAlī, perhaps not unexpectedly, follows the same line of thinking.[36]

The subject of the Mi'rāj offers itself in the discussion. Muir dismisses this in a page and a half in a language that belittles the importance of the whole issue in Islam. He writes that when Muḥammad wanted to tell his people about the experience, he was advised not

> ...to expose himself to derision of the unbelievers. But he persisted. ... As the story spread abroad, unbelievers scoffed and believers were staggered; some are even said to have gone back.[37]

This time he has no tradition to support this. He describes Muslim opinions about the issue as full of fanciful stories. To him, the insignificance or perhaps its falsity is seen from the fact that it is mentioned only in Sūrah al-Isra' or Banī Isrāīl.[38]

Muir's ridiculing of the incident seems to us to be another proof of his inconsistency and unfairness. If he believes in the transfiguration story in the life of Jesus and his bodily ascension and also the fact that the Bible says Elijah was carried into heaven in chariots of fire, it is strange that he cannot accept Muḥammad's experience as a deep and authentic spiritual incident.[39]

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35 Ibid., p. 332.

36 See his A Critical Examination of the Life and Teachings of Muhammad (1873), p. 87.

37 Muir: Life, pp. 121-122.

38 Ibid., p. 126.

39 Ameer Ali, in A Critical Examination, p. 59, poses a similar question and wonders why Christians who believe in the bodily ascension of Jesus and the case of Elijah feel the Muslim belief is less rational or improbable.
See Holy Bible: 2 Kings 2:11, Matthew 17:1 ff. and Acts 1:11.

From the psychology of religion we learn that the experience of Muḥammad in the Mi'rāj story is not ridiculous. It is a universal phenomenon in religious experience. By dismissing it the way he did, Muir shows lack of familiarity with contemporary sciences of the nineteenth century. He was not up to date with the scientific thoughts of his days.

Even though William James's work The Varieties of Religious Experience was published in 1902 and hence after Muir had written his work, it shows that enough scientific study of religion was in vogue during his time and he should have acquainted himself with it.

Syed Ahmad Khan takes up this issue also and analyses various traditions under eighteen sections.[40] He, however, rejects the idea existing among certain Westerners that the bodily ascension of Muḥammad is believed by all Muslims. He criticises Prideaux for thinking that the Mi'rāj event is an article of faith.[41] The real issue, he points out, is that the event was spiritual and even its denial, especially the bodily interpretation, does not make a Muslim an apostate.[42] One would have expected a scholar like Muir to give much thought to this incident and discuss that even those who believe in it as a physical ascension of Muḥammad are not irrational after all.[43]

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40 Khan: Life, p. 344 ff.

41 Ibid., p. 347.

42 Ibid., p. 372.
We need to note here however that the subject of acceptance of the bodily journey is a touchy one and cannot be dismissed as easily as Sir Syed Ahmad Khan does here. He was known not to be particularly disposed to accepting the miraculous and we suspect this is behind his reasoning. The issue has much to do with obedience to the Prophet.

43 Antonie Wessles has offered a detailed and serious discussion of Haykal's interpretation of this subject referring to several Muslim and Western opinions.
See his work: A Modern Arabic Biography of Muhammad - A Critical Study of Muhammad Husayn Haykal's Hayat Muhammad, (Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1972). See pp. 64-67; 81-84; 213-247.
See also: Widengren: Muhammad, The Apostle of God, and His Ascension (King and Saviour V), (Wiesbaden, Otto Harrassowitz & Uppsala, A-B. Lundequistka, Bokhandeln, 1955), esp. Chpt. V where the Qur'ānic evidence and various literature on the Mi'rāj are discussed.

2.3.4 MUḤAMMAD IN MADINA UP TO HIS DEATH:

Even though we have made references to Muir's criticism of Muḥammad in Makkah, it is his period in Madīna which receives the bitterest censures. Many Western scholars who see Muḥammad a prophet in Makkah see him differently in Madīna. He usually becomes a mere secular head of state; indeed sometimes a despotic ruler.

For many Christian thinkers of the nineteenth century, (including Muir) by establishing a worldly *Ummah* (community) in Madīna, Muḥammad betrayed the office of prophethood. He is accused by Muir of having used revelation

> ...as a means of reaching secular ends, and even...of ministering to lower objects.[44]

Nineteenth century Christian piety carved a sharp divide between religion and politics. Pietism which had its stress on holy life and good works was perhaps part of Muir's philosophy. In this philosophy religion is made an exclusively private affair with state and religion becoming completely divorced.

We read in Muir's life history that he was reluctant to use his official position as the governor and an official of the church to christianize. Is this an indicator of pietism?
However, when faced with the Indian Mutiny in 1857, he was prepared to use the imperial army to quell the revolt. He thought it was just. In fact, Clinton Bennet has pointed out that Muir used his official position for Christian missionary ends.[45]

Muir, as a perfect child of his Western culture finds it impossible to penetrate the cultural and religious environment of Muḥammad.

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44 Muir: Life, pp. 53-54.
45 See Bennet, C: Victorian Images of Islam, London, (Grey Seal Books, 1992), p. 14; see also Chpt. 5.

The scholar reopens the old chapter on Muḥammad's inability to perform miracles to prove his authenticity. He writes:

> ...the prophets of old were upheld (as we may suppose) by the prevailing consciousness of divine inspiration, and strengthened by the palpable demonstrations of miraculous power; while with the Arabian, his recollection of former doubts, and confessed inability to work any miracle, may at times have cast across him a shadow of uncertainty.[46]

Bosworth Smith has stated that

> ...the most miraculous thing about Muḥammad is, that he never claimed the power of working miracles.[47]

He continues in the same page that he is firmly convinced that Christians will one day uphold the prophethood of Muḥammad.

Leitner also remarks that:

> ...if self - sacrifice, honesty of purpose, unwavering belief in one's mission, a marvellous insight into existing wrong or error, and the perception and use of the best means for their removal, are among the outward and visible signs of inspiration, the mission of Muhammad was inspired.[48]

We see Muir's charge as a restatement of the earlier Christian strong contention that miracles constitute an essential, if not the most essential, factor in the proof of authentic prophethood. St. Thomas Aquinas held a similar opinion and put the charge on Muḥammad.[49]

Of course miracles have their place in the Islamic tradition as an authenticating evidence of prophethood. Islam recognizes the miracles of earlier prophets as valid but only on the

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46 Muri: Life, p. 126.

47 Rev. C.E. Bosworth-Smith: Muhammed and Muhammedanism, p. 340.

48 G. W. Leitner:Muhammadanism, (1889), p. 4.

49 See James Waltz: "Muhammad and Islam in St. Thomas Aquinas", Muslim WorldVol. 66, (1976) No. 2, pp. 81-95.
See also Daniel: Islam and the West, pp. 73-77.

understanding that it is solely within the permission of God that prophets work miracles. In the examples of prophets Ṣālih, Ibrāhīm, Mūsā and ʿIsā, God worked miracles to back them up.

The question of Muhammad's sexuality, especially in terms of polygamy constitutes another major theme of interest for the West and Muir for that matter. He writes:

> By uniting himself to a second wife Muhammad made a serious movement away from Christianity by the tenets and practice of which he must have known that polygamy was forbidden.[50]

Muir is applying a questionable 'Christian' yardstick to Muḥammad and he even overlooks the fact that Muḥammad took more wives when he was over fifty. At that advanced age, (of fifty plus) there seems a lot of sense in the argument that Muḥammad married so many for several varying reasons other than mere sexual appetite.

From the eleventh chapter, we find Muir departing more and more away from fairness in his study. He gives us a hint as to how he was going to deal with the rest of Muḥammad's life by saying that the reader was to see

> ...more stirring scenes.[51]

He charges Muḥammad of nurturing hostility against the Quraish in his heart and that he just wanted a fertile ground to translate that hatred into action. To him, Madīna offered that fertile ground. Muir does not seem to share the general opinion that Muḥammad did not leave Makkah for Madīna primarily to rearm himself against the stiff Makkan opposition and persecution but it was rather for the sake of peace. He was to save his people from possible extermination and also to prevent further turmoil in the Makkan society.

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50 Muir: Life, p.202.

51 Muir: Life, p. 202.

The various expeditions which, to Muir and many others like him, were engineered by Muhammad against the 'innocent' Quraishī caravans are also discussed. They form a substantial part of a larger plan to castigate Muḥammad in Madina. In each of them, Muḥammad appears as an aggressor. Muir's judgement usually looks one-sided. For example, he could not find anything worthwhile in the instructions Muḥammad gave to the leader of the Nakhla expedition, ʿAbdullah Ibn Jahsh to comment upon as to his character.

Cheragh ʿAlī has considered these so-called 'aggressive' expeditions in his work and he either rejects them as having no authentic basis or the interpretation put on them false. He follows Muir's assertions closely in his analysis.[52]

Muir discusses the main wars extensively portraying Muḥammad as engendering "savage spirit" and slaughtering innocent people in cold blood.[53]

On the battle of Badr, for example, Muir presents Muḥammad as starting the war but it is reasonable to assume that with the agreements made with the Madīnan delegation at al - ʿAqaba surviving and taking into account the apprehension he had of attack from Makkah, Muhammad would not have ventured to 'stir the beehive'.

Muir even suggests that the defeat of the Makkan army at Badr might have boosted the morale of the Muslims in Madīna. It can be argued that the real morale boost could only have been realistic if the war were a morally justifiable one as it is generally thought it was. It was for the repulsion of aggression and that was why the Muslims achieved some high spiritual elation.

Muir's own reference to the treatment given to some of the prisoners of war from Badr seems to contradict the charge of cruelty against Muḥammad. In fact, he does not reflect on this. He writes that when it comes to war, Muslims have no compunction. The whole

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52 Cheragh Ali: A Critical Examination of the Popular Jihad (188)5, pp. viii-xi, paragraphs 21-24, pp. 11, 12, 13 & 55-60.

53 Muir Life, pp. 227 ff.

discussion is tilted to weigh in favour of Muḥammad's opponents who are pictured as victims.[54]

The case of the Banū Qainuqāʿ and their subsequent expulsion is related in a mood which excites emotions. Muir portrays Muhammad as callous and inhuman by refusing the pleas of ʿAbdallah Ibn Ubayy.[55] It does not seem to show the same Muḥammad who set prisoners free. The same fervour is seen in the description of the so called 'secret assassinations'. The typical example is that of Ka'b Ibn al - Ashraf whose death, Muir says, is one of the

> dastardly acts of cruelty which darkens the pages of the prophet's life.[56]

In his narrative, he indicates that the instigation, assent and the go - ahead were all given by Muhammad. He, however, states that he is

> ...far from asserting that every detail in the... narrative, either of instigation by Muhammad or of deception by the assassin, is beyond question.[57]

The way he takes the stories about these killings seems to fit well into his thesis that any story of immense disadvantage to Muḥammad must be true. He is even able to find a tradition to support his assertion that some Muslims were murmuring at the behaviour of the prophet.[58]

His comparison of Christianity and Islam in the use of violence is very unfortunate and shows the bad methodology of comparing the ideal in one religion with real occurrence in the society of the other.

If the behaviour of Christians is to be judged in a '*Tu quoque*' fashion, we will realise that history contains several episodes of wars against the idolaters. The stories about the fall of Jericho, the Amalekites, the Amorites, and Jebusites alone point to the fact that different periods

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54 Ibid., pp. 233-4.
55 Ibid., pp. 241-2.
56 Ibid., p. 245.
57 Ibid., p. 248.
58 Ibid., see footnote on p. 248-249.

look at things differently and hence one cannot probably censure the Children of Israel for 'causing' these events to happen.[59]

Carlyle even reminds us that

> Charlemagne's conversion of the Saxons was not by preaching.[60]

Miller has also made a similar statement concerning violence and concludes that Christianity is perhaps more guilty.[61] Syed Ahmad Khan criticises Muir's imputation of violence against Muḥammad[62] and Ameer ʿAlī points out that certain issues taken by Muir as the grounds for criticism of Muḥammad do not exist in the great authorities like Ibn Hishām, al - Ṭabarī, Ibn al - Athīr and Abūl - Fidā.' He opines that where they even exist, they are either apocryphal or the interpretation put on them absolutely false.[63] A note here is perhaps necessary that the classical texts do not have the problems we have today concerning such issues because they are not using nineteenth century liberal idealism as a criterion.

On the Banū Nadīr, Muir doubts the events which led to their expulsion arguing that no trace of it exists in the Qur'ān. With that scholarly capability, Muir should have realised that the Qur'ān is not primarily a history book. Therefore the best place to see this will be in the traditions but standing by his principle, the story will put Muḥammad in good light and hence it will not be true.

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59 See Davenport, An Apology for Muhammad and the Koran, (1882), pp. 135-144.
See also Holy Bible: Joshua 6:10, 1 Samuel 15, Judges 1:21.

60 Carlyle, T.: 'The Hero as a Prophet: Mahomet in Islam' in On Heroes, Hero Worship and the Heroic in History, (1849), p. 61.

61 Miller, W.A.: 'A Note on Islam and the West' in Theology Vol 84, No. 697, (Jan. 1981), p. 37. He points out that Christianity is perhaps more guilty.

62 Khan: Life, pp. 432-437.

63 A Critical Examination, p. 82 footnote.

Perhaps the greatest issue giving the critics the best room to attack Muḥammad is that of the Banū Quraiza. Muir, not unexpectedly, spends a lot of time on it.

He rejects the argument of an existing pact between Muḥammad and the Jews of Madīna and therefore seems to propose that they were justified to take whatever decision they wanted. He sides with Sprenger that the experience at the battle of Uhud in which the help of the Jews was declined and the incidents of the two expulsions made Banū Quraiza remain a disinterested party in the Khandaq skirmishes. It is, however, not unreasonable to argue that knowing what happened to the Nadīr and the Qainuqāʿ, and the fact that they themselves have been prevented from fighting at Uhud, the Banū Quraiza would have become so incensed that they will see their future lie only in the rooting - out of the Muslims from Madīna. With the event of Uhud fresh in their minds, they were under no illusions that helping the Quraish army will enable them achieve the desired results. Muir's description of the executions is characteristic of the medieval era.[64]

By the rejection of any collaboration between the Quraiza and the Quraish, Muir, following Sprenger and others, lays down the foundation for seeing the case as barbaric, inhuman and Muḥammad himself not worthy of that noble office of prophethood.
This is perhaps why he is silent on the document dubbed the 'Constitution of Madīna'. By omitting it, there is no basis for Muḥammad accusing the Banū Quraiza of breaking a pact or being guilty of treachery even if the theory of plotting were to be accepted.

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64 Muir: Life, p. 316 ff.

Curiously enough, the scholar turns round to recognize that the behaviour of the Banū Quraiza was traitorous and demanded "a severe retribution" but objects to what took place saying it "...cannot be recognized otherwise than as an act of monstrous cruelty".[65] In the Mahomet and Islam he admits again that the Banū Quraiza merited severe chastisement for joining " the enemy at so critical a moment" even though he calls the punishment a "barbarous deed which cannot be justified by any reason of political necessity".[66]

Muir's position on this matter wavers a lot. After arguing that they remained a disinterested party in the Khandaq siege, he now recognizes that they plotted to join the enemy camp.

Even, granting that the punishment meted out was exactly as Muir describes, he does not share a suggestion that it indicates a firm implementation of justice.

Cheragh ʿAlī even looks at the situation on the basis of international law and though it may look a bit far fetched for a seventh century society, since this seems to be the very category Muir is thinking in, Cheragh ʿAlī's method is acceptable. He points out that the crime was high treason against a besieged city and hence they deserved to die. They were not killed merely for being prisoners of war, he argues. He doubts the authority upon which Muir rests his analysis and referring to Ibn Sayyad al - Nās, Abul Mo'tamar Sulaimān and Syed Ameer ʿAlī, rejects the numbers usually quoted as executed and referred to also by Muir, as grossly exaggerated to suit people's interest.[67]

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65 Ibid., p. 322.

66 Muir: Mahomet, p. 151.

67 See Cheragh ʿAlī: Popular Jihad, pp 87-91.

Ameer ʿAlī, after discussing the matter writes that

> We must in sentiment of pity, overlook the stern question of justice and culpability. We must bear in mind the crimes of which they were guilty, - their treachery, their open hostility, their defection from an alliance to which they were bound by every sacred tie.[68]

He concludes that the judgement was in

> ...perfect consonance with the laws of war, as then understood by nations of the world... these people brought their fate upon themselves.[69]

Barakat Ahmad re-examines the whole issue of relationship between Muḥammad and the Jews and seems to bring in a new phase altogether. He writes:

> Intergroup relations, especially when religion is also involved, are full of conflict and suffering. Martyrology feeds the myth and prejudice adds bitterness to the legend. Political expediency and biased scholarship invest the legend with the status of history. The account of Muhammad's relation with the Jews of the Hijaz is one of such legends.[70]

He introduces a new dimension into the episode doubting the details of the events as presented in many history books and in Muir's work for that matter.

After closely examining the *Sīrah* of Ibn Isḥāq, and noting the *isnād* carefully, he realises that out of the three hundred and four (304) only nine (9) were Jews or Jewish converts and the subjects they reported on do not refer to the 'heinous and atrocious killing' of the Jews as we often hear.

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68 A Critical Examination, p. 111.

69 Ibid., p. 112.

70 Ahmad Barakat: Muhammad and the Jews-A Re-examination, (1979), p. ix.

Barakat also notes that Jewish scholars do not mention the case of the Quraiza extermination and this is most unusual because the Jews are not used to forgetting their adversities.[71] He points out that Samuel Usque, who is described as a

> ...deft painter of Jewish suffering [who] caused the long procession of Jewish history to file past the tearful eyes of his contemporaries in all its sublime and glory and abysmal tragedy

did not refer to the story of the Banū Quraiza.[72]

We are not assuming that because the Jewish writers did not refer to it, it means the event did not happen at all. We cite Ahmad here merely to show that a whole new look could be taken at the issue.

The event at al - Hudaibiyyah is then touched on by Muir with the full story but no examination of as to what it tells us about Muḥammad's character. With all the previous narration about Muḥammad as inhuman, revengeful, warlike and bloodthirsty, there we are with Muḥammad accepting some unthinkable amendments to an already 'insulting' pact with his arch enemies who are now almost helpless at his feet.

Muir, in narrating the incident comments that the foundation is suspicious and even though it might have occurred, it is highly coloured. We suspect that because this is another opportunity for us to see a reasonable, diplomatic, calm, just and sincere Muḥammad, Muir doubts its authenticity. He applies his theory of 'disadvantageous tradition' as a law.[73]

In fact, this theory needs an indepth investigation because it could even be that what Muir and his colleagues might view as disadvantageous using nineteenth century Victorian

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71 Ibid., p. 24.

72 Ibid.

73 See Muir: Life, Chpt. XIX.

criteria may not have been regarded so by the seventh to eighth century transmitters. Hence, the method again implies anachoronism.

It might even be possible to turn the concept around and say that the type of tradition transmitted might be an indicator to what seventh to eighth century transmitters considers advantageous which might give a very different value system from that applied by Muir. A deeper discussion of this theory is however beyond the immediate concerns of this thesis.

The attention shifts back onto expeditions. The description of the way Kināna, the chief of Khaybar, was killed after the conquest, is couched in a language reminiscent of the Medieval period where the sole objective was to paint Muḥammad as evil as possible.[74]

Muḥammad's humane attitude towards the poor and the needy is always a cursory reference usually in a sentence or two. For example, after stressing Muḥammad's allocations of state property to his own household, and part to the army, he remarks in passing that "the poor were also not forgotten.".[75]

We realise that if he gives much prominence to the concern for the poor, the needy and the like, it will contradict the uncaring image of Muḥammad he has constructed. On Muḥammad's return to Makkah for the lesser pilgrimage (*Umrah*) according to the terms of al - Hudaibiyyah, Muir becomes silent.

The fact that Muḥammad accepted to leave Makkah city without even celebrating his wedding feast (in the marriage to Maimūna) tells us a lot about him. Unfortunately, these will be favourable and Muir generally resents that. If the Prophet were heartless, of dubious character and always ready to fabricate revelations to satisfy his own personal desires, he could

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74 Ibid., pp. 376-8.
75 Ibid., p. 380.

have used one of these avenues to continue staying in Makkah at least until the consummation of his marriage.

Muir is really bent on seeing Muḥammad a different man in Madīna. On the triumphant entry into Makkah, there is no discussion as to the lessons we can learn about Muhammad from the event.

Lane-Poole points out that Muḥammad surprised all his critics who were expecting blood in the streets now that the old bitterest enemies stand impotent before him.[76]

People might argue that Muḥammad knew his entry had received no definable opposition, hence he spared his opponents. But even that would have told us something about his character. The mean, violent and cruel Muḥammad is now ordering his soldiers not to cause any harm.[77]

If he were by nature implacable and vindictive as he is portrayed, it would have made no difference between showing mercy when there is no opposition and being harsh when resisted. Muir, however admits that Muḥammad's magnanimity on this occasion was admirable but in order to counter any reference to accepting his exemplary morality, he is quick to add that, Muḥammad did that for strategic reasons. He says

> It was indeed for his own interest to forgive the past, and cast into oblivion its slights and injuries.[78]

In many cases, Muḥammad's strategic skills are given prominence for the wrong reasons. The argument is basically to show him as not only clever but also sly.

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76 See S. Lane-Poole: Selection from the Qur'an and Hadith (1882) (1975 reprint) pp. 28-29.

77 Muir Life, p. 411.

78 Ibid.

2.3.5 CONCLUSION

The last chapter of the book is devoted specifically to an appraisal of the person and character of Muḥammad in a thematic form in the light of the discussions in the preceding chapters.

Lyall writes about Muir's work in the following words:

> ...It can scarcely be doubted that the author always strive to be just and fair: anyone who has read the thirty - seventh chapter, dealing with the character of the prophet, must be convinced of this.[79]

This statement does not seem convincing because the average assessment of the book will not produce such a picture.

We do not deny the fact that he gives fair comments about his personal appearance, faithfulness, moderation, and magnanimity. It may be true also that he appreciates Muḥammad's deep - conviction of divine guidance, steadfastness, determination and honesty in Makkah and strong denunciation of polytheism and idolatry.

However, his censures regarding the prophet as cruel, crafty, deceptive, voluptuous, sexually profligate, inconsistent, fabricating revelations, and the fact that his prophethood attenuated into worldly and evil affairs counteract every fairness that can be said of him.

Again, Lyall's remarks cannot be objective. If the thirty-seventh chapter alone is what the book has to show Muir's impartiality then it is very inadequate in the light of the size of the book. From the way the arguments are constructed, it is difficult to see Muir as balancing his thesis.

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79 See his 'Obituary of Sir William Muir', p. 877.

Muir's main themes of emphasis in the book has been falsity of Muḥammad's prophethood, faking of revelations to justify evil acts, violence, sexuality, immorality and the like. It is only fair to point out that no disinterested reader will disagree that the book has very much been founded on *parti pris.*

Certainly issues like the charter of Madīna, treatment of the poor, the needy and prisoners of war and slaves, patience towards his adversaries in Madīna, his meekness towards people, the event at al - Hudaibiyyah and the peaceful entry into Makkah deserve far better attention than he has given them.

Furthermore, to refuse to accept the authenticity of the immense religious experience of Muḥammad is a major shortcoming in Muir's work. To reduce Muḥammad to a mere world hero or ruler, misses the real personality entirely.

The assessment of Muḥammad on Christian principles is a very inapposite methodology to use in academic scholarship.

Sometimes the very language he uses seems vulgar and this does not put the book in a good stand before academics.

Syed Ahmad Khan has pointed out that the mere fact that Muir undertook the study at the instigation of Reverend Karl Pfander alone made him strive under a heavy dose of prejudice, bias, and Christian polemics which show up in his work.[80]

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[80] Khan: Life, pp. xviii-xix; Lyall makes an observation like this as well. See footnote 2 to his obituary article.

He again criticises Muir's attitude to the *ḥadīth* and maintains that by using the strict suspicious method, Muir had already prejudiced the outcome of his study.[81]

Higgins accuses certain Christian scholars of writing so negatively about Muḥammad that even though they were learned and

> ...indeed ought to have been above such conduct, ...(their) zeal in this case actually destroyed their senses of right and wrong, and as it should seem, taken away from them the use of their understanding.[82]

We are afraid this might be true of Sir William Muir as well. His academic calibre was too good enough for him to have made the kind of prejudiced interpretations he made.
For Barakat Ahmad and Sir Syed Ahmad, Muir's uncritical reliance on al - Wāqidī's material has become baneful to the status of the work.[83]

Earle H.Waugh discusses the problems the Western writer encounters in dealing with Muḥammad. He sees the prophet as a "paradigmatic figure" who has to be tackled on several lines before any appreciable assessment can be made of him.[84]

Muir had the original sources before him but, as a blacksmith with a piece of iron in front of him, he has made a hoe instead of the expected cutlass. His defectiveness is not that he could not read the Arabic but insisting that he reads it in a particular way.

From our foregoing review, we might have to maintain that certain intellectual attitudes in the middle ages towards Muḥammad have crystallised into patterns of thought and have been echoed for millennia and worn smooth by generations of Western scholars both historians and

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81 Ibid., p. 299.

82 Abu Fazl, Mr. Godfrey Higgin's Apology for Mohammed, A Verbatim Reprint, edited with introduction, critical notes, Appendices, and a chapter on Islam, (Allahabad, Reform Society, 1929), p. 11.

83 See Ahmad Barakat, Muhammad and the Jews, pp. 18-19 and Syed Ahmad Khan Life, p.xiv and p. 304.

84 See his article "The Popular Muhammad-Models in the interpretation of an Islamic paradigm" in R.C. Matin (ed.) Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies, (1985), pp. 41-54 esp. pp. 42.3.

theologians. However much Muir has tried to divest himself of the old heritage, traces, too evident to overlook as insignificant, remain in him.

CHAPTER THREE.

DAVID SAMUEL MARGOLIOUTH.

3.1 CHOICE OF MARGOLIOUTH.

After the work of Muir in the second half of the nineteen century, there was not much development of new English material on Muḥammad in the English West. If there were any at all, they were essentially repetitions of what one might safely call the 'Muir theories'.

Probably the only scholar to enter the arena with a new hit was Professor David Samuel Margoliouth. For almost half a century interval (1861-1905) one would expect new development in the field of methodology. Fifty years of growth of general scholarship and comparative religion in particular, should definitely have an impact on the way scholars write. It is basically this, together with the academic standing of Margoliouth himself, which make us investigate this scholar's work on Muḥammad.

Though he wrote extensively on Islam, his main book which gives a definite biographical study and critique of Muḥammad is his Moḥammed and the Rise of Islam (1905).[1] This work has received acclaim from Western reviewers while Muslims have largely been suspect of its value as an academic work. This is his *magnum opus*, so to say, hence our main critique would be based on this work.

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1 Mohammed and the Rise of Islam, (New York & London: G.P. Putnam, The Knickerbocker Press, 1905).

3.1.1 THE MAN MARGOLIOUTH AND HIS INTELLECTUAL BIOGRAPHY.

Professor David Samuel Margoliouth was born in London on 17th. October 1858 and died in London as well on 22nd. March 1940 at a revered age of 81 yrs. He was the only son of Ezekiel Margoliouth and Sarah Iglitzki. The father, who was formerly a rabbi, became an Anglican missionary to the Jews.

His father's uncle, Moses Margoliouth (1818-1881),[2] was himself a Jewish convert into Christianity who was well-known for his expertise in Biblical and Oriental studies and served in his latter years as a vicar in Little Linford in Buckinghamshire.[3]

David S. Margoliouth was therefore a Jew by descent and a product of Jewish converts into Christianity. He was born of a strong Anglican missionary background.

It is important for these roots of the author to be noted because they would shape his thought-patterns.

In school, Margoliouth was exceptionally bright and crowned his efforts with a first class honours in New College, Oxford.

He assumed the Laudian Chair of Arabic in the University of Oxford in 1889 and held on to the Chair until about 1937 when he retired due to failing health.

As a perfect child of his family, he got ordained in 1899 and was soon to become famous as an eloquent and brilliant, but somewhat curious, preacher. He had the knack for

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2 Encyclopedia Judaica Vol.11, (Jerusalem, Ketter Publishing House Ltd., 1971), pp. 966-7;
Other dates given are 1820-1881. See: Singer, Isidore (Ed.), The Jewish Encyclopedia vol. VIII, (New York & London: Funk & Wagnalls, MDCCCCIV (1904)), p.330.
and also: Sir Leslie Stephen & Sir Sidney Lee (eds.), The Dictionary of National Biography - From the Earliest Times to 1900, vol.XII, (London: Oxford University Press, 1921-1922), p. 1044.

3 The Dictionary of National Biography Vol. XII, Ibid.lists thirteen major works to his credit.

travels and went on lecturing tours to India and also, for a while, in Iraq. Gilbert Murray, describing the man, asserts rather extravagantly that:

> ...he built up a reputation of knowing Islamic things better than the Moslems themselves...[4]

The author of this biographical piece says further:

> At the time of his death, Margoliouth had among the Islamic peoples of the East, and indeed among the Oriental scholars in Europe, 'an almost legendary reputation'.[5]

He won a number of academic scholarships for his brilliance in extensive and diversive fields like Arabic, Greek, Hebrew, Latin, Sanskrit, Syriac and Turkish. His expertise in Arabic literature is testified to by the following statement in The Dictionary of National Biography:

> Unlike most scholars he was a brilliant linguist, and although somewhat silent in English, he became full of conversation when addressed in Arabic or Turkish.[6]

Perhaps his natural endowment in the field of academia blinded him to become a bit arrogant. An incident is reported of a critique someone made of some of his theories on ancient Greek literature. His reply to his critic was to make an elaborate display of his genius.[7]

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4 Wickham Legg, L.G. (Ed.), The Dictionary of National Biography 1931-1940, (London: Oxford University Press, 1949), (Hereinafter cited as DNB), p. 597.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid., p. 598.

7 Ibid. One of his critics was known to have pointed out by some other arguments that his work on the Iliad and the Odyssey of Homer were not unique; he became enraged. Murray says:

" ...he retorted by producing not merely 'signatures' by anagram but also dates in the first threee couplets of various tragedies".

He then continues:

"It is difficult to know how far he was serious in these exercises of ingenuity."

In another controversy, he took pains to try and justify his claim that the Egyptian papyri with information of Jewish settlement in Egypt as early as the 5th. and even 6th. century B.C. were phonies. Murray again points out that despite the fact that only a few people agreed with him, his critics seemed silenced because he raised some complex questions which could not be answered .

As an Oriental scholar, he achieved his mark by writing extensively on almost every subject. He was able to handle some very intricate areas in Arabic literature with ease.

It was widely recognized that his book Mohammad and the Rise of Islam (1905) was a sort of masterpiece which convinced people that he was an able scholar of Islam. Together with his Mohammedanism (1911) and the Hibbert Lectures of 1913 entitled Early Development of Mohammedanism, Margoliouth became known as one whose works were standards in their fields.[8]

He was, however, seen as a controversialist by some scholars. His works, as Murray points out, with:

> ....their ironical tone sometimes infuriated his Muslim readers.[9]

In 1925, in an article he published in the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society he poured scorn on the authenticity of pre-Islamic Arabian poetry, the first time a scholar of his calibre had raised a question like that.[10]

In that article he wrote:

> If on the question whether Arabic versification goes back to immemorial antiquity or is later than the Qur'an it seems wisest to suspend judgement, the reason lies in the bewildering character of the evidence that is before us. We are on safe ground when we are dealing with inscriptions; and the Qur'an can be trusted for the condition of the Arabs to whom it was communicated in the Prophet's time. But for the history of Arabic verse we have to go to other authorities, who for the most part treat of times and conditions for which they themselves had not experienced, and whose training had caused them to assume much that necessarily misled them. In judging their statements we can carry scepticism too far, but we may be too credulous.[11]

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8 See his Mohammedanism, (London, Williams & Norgate, ca. 1911).
The Early Development of Mohammedanism (Hibbert Lectures), (London, Williams & Norgate, 1914).

9 DNB, p. 599.

10 See his article, 'The Origins of Arabic Poetry' in The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Vol.LVII, (1925), pp. 417-449.

Margoliouth was born with a photographic memory which was a stupendous boon for his enormous and ambitious field in the academia. Gilbert Murray again writes:

> It was in editing and translating, Arabic texts, that Margoliouth's scholarship found its most congenial field. His prodigious memory, which carried without effort the fruits of his vast range of reading in many languages, was an unequalled instrument for his task.[12]

He was known to be scrupulously accurate in translations.

He was on the Council of the Royal Asiatic Society from 1905, became its director in 1927 and president from 1934 to 1937. In 1928, he was awarded a Gold Medal for his excellent services to the Society. He became the president of the Eastern Question Association in 1910 and chairman of the governing council of Warneford Hospital for Mental Diseases, Headington, Oxford.

He was also a fellow of the British Academy in 1915 and it was under its auspices that he delivered the Schweich Lectures for 1921 on '<u>The Relations Between Arabs and the Israelites Prior to the Rise of Islam</u>'.[13]

Further, Margoliouth's adeptness in his field was commended with a fellowship of the German Oriental Society in 1934 and also of the American Oriental Society in 1937.

He is described as having almost emotional and extreme attachment to orthodoxy and sceptical of all things against what he held to be the truth. He had much love for the Jews and was really sympathetic to their cause.

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11 Ibid., p. 449.

12 <u>DNB</u>, p. 599.

13 Published for the British Academy by Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press: London, 1924.

In concluding his article in the Dictionary of National Biography, Murray points out that Margoliouth:

> .... was certainly a man of most massive learning and great ingenuity. In problems of literature his judgement seems often to have been unbalanced, a fault which was more conspicuous because he never 'played for safety' or took refuge in vagueness.[14]

One might be tempted to comment that Margoliouth was so self-confident that he possibly never thought of making mistakes. It is almost always advisable in scholarship that one writes while creating a 'safety net' because man being the fallible creature he is could even, if unintentionally, make unpardonable mistakes. But it could also be argued that such 'safety nets' are to be created by scholars who are possibly not fully confident in themselves. Margoliouth was a scholar who perhaps deemed himself completely and absolutely confident with material in his field. The biographer therefore adds that Margoliouth:

> .... had an immense memory. He was never slipshod, never unprepared. No scholar of his generation left so deep and permanent a mark on Oriental studies.[15]

In an obituary, Arthur Jeffery pays him a glowing tribute placing his name within the group of specialists in the field of Islamic Studies in the West. He is reckoned alongside celebrated non-English writers like Antoine Isaac Baron Silvestre de Sacy, Heinrich Leberecht Fleischer, Theodor Nöldeke, Ignaz Goldziher and Reinhardt Dozy.[16]

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14 DNB, p. 599.
15 Ibid.
16 See Jeffery, A 'David Samuel Margoliouth' in Muslim World, Vol. XXX, No.3, (July 1940), p. 295.

His reputation of being a linguistic prodigy was widely known amongst scholars acknowledging his towering status among his contemporaries. He was a unique polyglot. Arthur Jeffery states that he:

> ... had few rivals in his knowledge of Persian, Turkish, Armenian and Syriac, as well as being an Hebraist.[17]

This is all in addition to his high competence in Greek and Latin and being

> ... the foremost Arabist in Europe.[18]

He opened the door to his academic excellence with his thesis entitled Analecta Orientalia Ad Poeticam Aristoteleam published in 1888. In this field of Greek Classics, he followed up in 1911 with a publication of The Poetics of Aristotle and thirteen years later with a book entitled The Homer of Aristotle. It was in the last work that he advanced some arguments on the subject of chronograms which became controversial in the world of academia at the time.[19]

He cultivated an early interest in the Islamic Near East and it is suggested that he took to the study of Hindustāni merely to have a springboard for the study of Islam in the Indian sub-continent.[20]

Like his uncle Moses Margoliouth, he made extensive writings in biblical scholarship but these were mainly articles for dictionaries, encyclopaedias and eminent academic journals.

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17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

19 See Ibid., pp. 295-296 and DNB, p. 598.
The feat he accomplished which baffled his contemporaries was that he was able to reorganize the lines of the Greek Tragedies without tampering with the real substance and in each case he got a grammatically and metrically logical arrangement with sound meaning. His detractors, he accused, could not produce solid grounds for their objection. Margoliouth was in a class of his own.

20 See Jeffery 'David Samuel Margoliouth', p. 296.

The case was similarly so in the area of Armenian and Syriac intellectualism. As the lines of Arthur Jeffery's obituary go:

> He was very conservative in Biblical studies, and somewhat unduly suspicious of critical work on the Old Testament, even producing a little book, now almost forgotten, Outlines of a Defence of the Biblical Revelation.[21]

Margoliouth made his mark in the world of intellectual excellence through Arabic and Islamic Studies a field in which his name is held in great esteem.

In addition to the works mentioned earlier, the scholar also came out with the Letters of Abū'l-'Alā' in 1898 and single-handedly edited Yāqūt's Dictionary of Learned Men a work of seven volumes, between 1907-1931. Further, in 1922, he worked with H.F. Amedroz to edit the six volumes of Miskawaihī's Eclipse of the Abbasid Caliphate.

He was also reputed to be one of the rare able and gifted Arabic papyrologists and in 1893 he produced a book on the Bodlein Library Arabic Papyri and did the same in 1933 for the papyri material held in the John Rylands Library in Manchester.

We would not be doing justice to the erudition of Professor Margoliouth if we were to make it to appear that he was some recluse scholar who wrote for a select academic club. He served the general public as well. His work entitled Cairo, Jerusalem and Damascus published in London in 1907 is a fine testimony to this.[22] Further, in 1939, a year before he passed away, he published another piece on Muḥammad in the series What Did They Teach? and this was meant for general public consumption.

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21 Ibid.

22 Ibid., p. 297.

Arthur Jeffery notes that even though he passed away at the ripe age of 81, Margoliouth was fortunate, and:

> .... Islamic Studies will ever be poorer for the loss of those projects....[23]

which could not see the light of day due to his demise.

His writing and unyielding efforts in unearthing new evidence in classical works was highly appreciable. It is therefore not surprising that the eulogist ends by asking whether some monumental work might be done to the glory of:

> .... a great and painstaking scholar, whose influence over successive generations of students has been very great, and whose views, even if not always acceptable, were always stimulating and deserving of consideration?[24]

Margoliouth's competence in his field is continuously attested to by scholars. A reviewer of his presentation at the Schweich Lectures writes:

> As a whole, the subject of the lectures requires a wide range of knowledge for its adequate treatment. No one could be more peculiarly well qualified to deal with it than Professor Margoliouth. He shows himself as much at home in philology, epigraphy, and Hebrew literature as he is in Arabic poetry and pre-Islamic history. He collects the latest results of modern researches, and all his facts are supported by reference where necessary. His clear arrangement and valuable and interesting comment make the lectures good reading.[25]

Frank Hugh Forster, whose article on the question of 'Islam as a heresy' received comments and rebuttal by Margoliouth,[26] replies in a short note justifying his arguments in the earlier article.

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23 Ibid.

24 Ibid., p. 298.

25 See JRAS Vol. LVII (1925), pp.153-154 under 'Review of Arabic Subjects'.

26 See: Margoliouth, 'Is Islam a Christian Heresy?' in MW Vol. XXIII, No. 1, (Jan. 1933), pp. 6-15.
For Foster's main article, see: MW Vol. XXII No.2, (April 1932), pp. 126-133.
Foster's main line of reasoning is that Islam has too many Christian ideas, even though many of them 'misrepresented' to be seen as closer to any religion than Christianity. He enumerates some issues including: the status given to Jesus, which Judaism would never do, the belief in the return of Jesus at the

However, despite the contention between the two, Forster pays homage to his critic's academic acumen. He writes:

> I am prepared to accept Professor Margoliouth's authority upon this subject. He is an eminent Arabic scholar, one of the first now living, among whom our own Macdonald is to be numbered. I do not regard myself as belonging to that class at all.[27]

Eliot Howard's review of Margoliouth's Mohammed and the Rise of Islam contains an instructive statement which adds to the numerous attestations to the latter as a man of prowess in the domain of Islamic Studies. He states:

> This book is of importance owing to the perfect knowledge of Arabic possessed by the writer. he is able to collect his materials at first hand, and, whether he is dealing with the Koran or with the numerous Muslim writers whom he quotes, we have confidence that he knows his subject thoroughly.[28]

The Encyclopaedia Britannica, writing on him, says that Margoliouth's

> ...pioneer efforts in Islamic Studies won him a near legendary reputation among Islamic peoples and Oriental scholars of Europe.[29]

He was supposed to have been regarded in Baghdād as:

> ...more knowledgeable on Islamic matters than most Arab scholars.[30]

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end of time, the belief in the final judgement (which has less emphasis in Judaism) and the Qur'anic idea of Jesus' death which he considers as a Gnostic influence. He also cites the reference in the Qur'ān about Jesus as an infant, making clay birds and making them have life and also Jesus speaking from the cradle. He claims that these ideas came from a document entitled 'Arabic Gospel of the Infacy of the Saviour' which he thought Muḥammad probably read. He then laments that Muḥammad:

> ...thus became a heretic before he had ever become Orthodox.

See p. 130 of the article.

Margoliouth's rejection of the argument is straightforward that Islam could not be a Christian sect.

27 Foster: Reply to Professor Margoliouth's Article, Jan. 1933. MW Vol. XXIII No.2, (April 1933), p.198.

28 See: The Church Missionary Intelligencer, Vol. 57, (July 1906), p. 545.

29 The New Encyclopedia Britannica, Micropedia Vol. VI, (Chicago & London: Helen Hemingway Benton, 1974), p. 615.

30 Ibid.

Inayatullah, writing in the 'Personalia' column of the Islamic Culture on 'Three British Orientalists', is very critical of Margoliouth but at the same time he acknowledges his eminence by describing him as a man of unique unquestionable scholarship in Islam.[31]

It is with all these in view that David Samuel Margoliouth is chosen as a representative of English Orientalist writers on Muḥammad within the period he wrote. With his position as the Professor of Arabic in Oxford (1889-1937), and the numerous testimonies from other eminent scholars, he adequately merits the selection.

Margoliouth was the most prominent British writer on Muḥammad and indeed on Islam during the period of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when the field was virtually devoid of English material.

3.2 STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK.

We have more or less justified our choice of the scholar's work Moḥammed and the Rise of Islam as the main textbook which underscores his views on the life of Muḥammad.

The book divides into thirteen chapters and each of these is expertly treated within the context of English Orientalist writing.

It begins with an analysis of the roots of Muḥammad looking at the pre-Islamic Arabia. The argument then develops through his early life, how Islam evolved secretly, became open, analysis of the Hijra event, the first battle and the ups and downs in the progress of the nascent religion. The panorama continues with the confrontation with the Jewish communities, a subject he deals with in a rather melodramatic way for very obvious reasons, which we would

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31 See: Islamic Culture, Vol.XI No.4, (Oct. 1937), pp. 534-536.

come to later. He then looks at the re-entry into Makkah and ends with Muḥammad's last moments.

In the preface, he pays homage to writers on Muḥammad, both Muslim and non-Muslim, and considers Sir Walter Raleigh's The Life and Death of Mahomet published in London in 1637 as the most famous of the biographies. However, he states that:

> The palm of eloquence and historical insight may well be awarded to Gibbon.[32]

3.2.1 HIS SOURCES.

Even though Abū al-Fidā's work on the biography of Muḥammad was a major source of reference at them time of Gibbon, Margoliouth says that nineteenth century scholars had to go beyond Abū al-Fidā to the original sources the Muslims had since he (Abū al-Fidā) was such a late authority.[33] After lauding earlier scholars like Weil, de Perceval, Wüstenfeld, Sprenger and Muir for their skills in bringing some of these original sources to light, the author points out the defects in Muir's and Sprenger's works even though he still considered them as classical.[34] Muir's work is described as:

> ...written with confessedly Christian bias.

While Sprenger's is said to be:

> .... defaced by some slipshod scholarship and untrustworthy archaeology.[35]

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32 Margoliouth, Mohammed, p. iii.
33 Ibid. (Abū al-Fidā d. ca.722 A.H., ca.1322 C.E.).
34 Ibid., p. iv.
35 Ibid.

The initial impression created here is that Margoliouth's work is going to stand out from the crowd and would not fall into the same snares that the earlier scholars he criticises were caught in. He relies much on the *musnad* of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and the Tafsīr of al-Ṭabarī, including others like the Iṣābah or dictionary of individuals who had personal knowledge of Muḥammad compiled by Ibn Ḥajar.[36]

The works of ʿAmr ibn Baḥr called Al-Jāḥiẓ which was a polygraph is also mentioned as important. About these works the scholar remarks that:

> Though not dealing directly with Moḥammed, they contain many an allusion which it is possible to utilize.[37]

Referring to the traditions (*aḥādīth*) which he considers as ahistorical and forged, Margoliouth writes:

> The number of motives leading to the fabrication of traditions was so great that the historian is in constant danger of employing as veracious records that were deliberate fictions.[38]

He then adds that:

> I can only hope that I have displayed greater credulity than my predecessors,[39]

assuring the reader of his commitment to fair scholarship. He categorically states that the book:

> ....does not aim at being either an apology or an indictment.[40]

This statement is to be put to test in the analysis which follows shortly.

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36 Calcutta 1853-1894, 4 vols., see Ibid., p.v.

37 Moḥammed, p. v.

38 Ibid., p. vi.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid., p. vii.

It is his candid opinion that Syed Ameer ʿAlī's work is the greatest apologetic work for Muḥammad while Muir's falls within the domain of an indictment.[41]

He claims that while other works seek to prove the superiority or otherwise of Islam vis-a-vis another religion, his work does not follow that course. He asserts that he has freed himself from all these prejudices.[42]

These are very positive statements asservations and coming from a scholar of that eminence, the student should, under normal circumstances, not have any qualms with the material he has set himself to read. He sets his ideas into a context by discussing pre-Islamic Arabian history and Arabia in the period of Muḥammad's advent. He writes that:

> Religious fanaticism was introduced by Islam, as an addition to the dangers of the country; otherwise Arabia of the twentieth century is similar to the Arabia of the sixth.[43]

After speaking gloriously of the pre-Islamic Arab in terms of wisdom, pride, strength, courage, piety and fidelity as expressed by some scholars, he seems to suggest that these values are illusory. He considers the Old Testament as the source of Arab genealogical wisdom and asserts that many of the claims by them are not true historical facts, with fanciful ideas finding their way into the general corpus. He states that:

> ... the steps which connected the individual with the founder of the clan, and those whereby the clan was deduced from the tribe, represents a theory rarely a genuine tradition; and instances are not wanting of both persons and clans being artificially grafted on tribes with which they had no physical connection.[44]

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41 Syed Ameer 'Alī, The Spirit of Islam, (London, 1896, Calcutta, 1902).
Sir William Muir, The Life of Mahomet, (London, 1861).

42 Mohammed, p. vii.

43 Ibid., p. 2.

44 Ibid., p. 5.

Margoliouth disputes the ancient antiquity of Makkah saying that Muslims have given the city the ancient status because of theological speculation. He argues that a:

> ... more sober tradition placed the building of the first house at Meccah only a few generations before Moḥammed's time, this act being ascribed to a member of the tribe Sahm, whose name was variously given as Su'aid, son of Sahm and Sa'd son of Amr.[45]

It could be argued that the scholar is, in these arguments against the genealogical consciousness of the Arabs and the antiquity of Makkah, in a real sense laying a foundation for some profound arguments against a large chunk of the superstructure of Islam. We here foresee a groundwork preparation for rejecting the *aḥādīth,* a subject he has already touched on.[46]

He starts a critical approach to Islam by pointing to the evidence exists to support the fact that the ancient Arabs worshipped stones. He hence concludes that the black stone connected with the Ka'bah has been:

> ... thought to be the real god of the Meccans.[47]

He speculates the Origin of Allah, saying:

> It seems possible that Allah, really a male deity, of which al-Lat was the female, identified by Mohammed with the object of monotheistic adoration, was the tribal god of the Kuraish; and indeed in lines which may possibly be pre-Islamic the Kuraish are called Allah's family.[48]

In his usage of Muslim sources, Margoliouth is always suspicious. In his article on Muḥammad in the Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics he plays down the authoritativeness of almost every classical Muslim writer.[49]

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45 Ibid., p. 7.
46 See supra footnote 38.
47 Margoliouth, Mohammed, p. 8.
48 See: Ibid., p. 19.
49 See: Hastings, James (ed.): Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, (Hereinafeter cited ERE)Vol. VIII, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1915), pp. 871-880.

He takes on Ibn Isḥāq's work which he says is not extant but main parts exist in the works of Ibn Hishām and al-Ṭabarī. He then asserts that:

> Its author was in communication with eminent members of the prophet's family, but is said to have been a man of indifferent morals, besides being a Shīite and a Qadarī (believer in the freedom of will); he employed versifiers to compose poems to be put into the mouths of the personages who figure in his narrative, and his credibility was otherwise impugned.[50]

He takes little interest in the works of Mūsā b.ʿUqbah, al-Wāqidī and his secretary Ibn Saʿd and also the collections of Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal. He describes these works as not of enough historical utility. He however settles for Ibn Isḥāq assigning three main reasons for his preference. He sees Ibn Isḥāq as being conscious of events in chronological order, keeping out supernatural or metaphysical issues. Thirdly, he says:

> The character which the narrator ascribes to his prophet, is on the whole exceedingly repulsive.[51]

This, he argues, is indicative of Ibn Isḥāq's independence of mind resisting all forms of influence from society or those in authority as it happened to many scholars of the day.

In a sermon preached in St. Aldgate's Church, Oxford, on the occasion of the Oxford Church Missionary Association on February 11, 1900, Margoliouth lays bare his emotive attack on Muḥammad and Islam. He castigates Muslim scholars for attributing edifying fables to the Prophet, attempting to make an ethical man out of him.[52]

One appreciates the circumstances in which the preacher was speaking. To an audience of the Church Missionary Association, he probably thought he had to say these things.

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50 Ibid., p. 872.
51 Ibid., p. 873.
52 See: The Church Missionary Intelligencer, Vol. 51, (1900), pp. 241-248.

However, it could be argued that with his position and eminence in the circle of elite scholars of Islamic Studies, one would have expected a little tone-down vituperation. It seems therefore that Margoliouth's mistrust of Muslim scholars is deeply embedded in his subconscious probably due to his dual Jewish and Christian backgrounds.

3.3 SELECTED THEMES

3.3.1 THE PATHOLOGICAL THEORY.

Margoliouth's choice of themes is reflected in the way he almost immediately discusses the age-old issue of Muḥammad being an epileptic.

The subject has been dealt with in the previous chapters in the Medieval scholarship and the analysis of Muir's work. However, its recurrence here seems to support our earlier contention that many of the Medieval theories about Muḥammad had a strong impact on the academic scene and defied all changes in scholarship to survive. Margoliouth writes that:

> ... the notion current among Christian writers that he was subject to epilepsy finds curious confirmation in the notices recorded of his experiences during the process of revelation the importance of which is not lessened by the probability that the symptoms were often artificially produced.[53]

After describing the experiences of Muḥammad when receiving revelations as recorded by certain scholars, he mentions two instances only in which the fits, he thought, were not personally induced. He gives the case of his fainting at the Battle of Badr and the occasion that

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53 **Margoliouth, Mohammed, pp. 45-66.**

he passed out when being bled after fasting. Margoliouth however admits that:

> ... some of the signs of severe epilepsy - biting of the tongue, dropping what is in the hand, and gradual degeneration of the brain power - were wanting.[54]

There is a further hint of the pathological theory when the scholar discusses the children born to Muḥammad and Khadījah.He notes correctly that the sons died in infancy but adds that the girls were sickly and after pointing out that the longest surviving daughters never celebrated her fortieth birthday, concludes that:

> ...some who understand medicine have drawn their inferences about the father.[55]

There is an innuendo here that Muḥammad himself was a weakling perhaps attributing this to his belief that he (Muḥammad) was a pathological case. This is the most rational explanation to his implication. Because there is not evidence, it seems to us to support the suggestion that Muḥammad was a weakling. His robust health is always testified to by the general difficult duties he had to shoulder as a leader under intense persecution and pressure in Makkah and the even more arduous tasks he had to undertake in Madīna.. There is no hint anywhere that Muḥammad's health was impaired substantially to merit such opinion. By not providing any support for that reasoning showing which medical experts thought Muḥammad's health was feeble, Margoliouth overlooks a crucial principle in academic scholarship - supporting an argument with sound, authentic evidence.

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54 Ibid., p. 46.
55 Ibid., p. 69.

Margoliouth returns to the subject of epilepsy in the third chapter. He states:

> We have already seen reason for believing that Moḥammed at sometime had epileptic fits; whence the phenomena accompanying such a fit may have suggested a form which could afterwards be artificially reproduced.[56]

In his article on Muḥammad in the Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics he gives some conflicting signals with regard to this theory. He refers to the opinions of Sprenger and other scholars who write on the theme but doubts whether the so called 'fits' were real.

Despite his earlier reference in his biographical work on Muḥammad as referred to already, he finds it strange that the reality defies the theory. He is looking at Muḥammad's acknowledged hale and hearty personality and casts some doubt on the authenticity of the theory. He writes:

> It is clear that he was a man of great physical strength, since his life as TYRANT [emphasis ours] of Medina was spent in constant military expeditions, added to the cares of a rapidly increasing community, of which he was at once priest, legislator, ruler and judge. Yet we never hear of his breaking down under the strain. The 'fits' seem to have been experienced only when they were required for the delivery of the revelations, and in no case to have interfered with his activities.[57]

From the statement one might think that Margoliouth rejects the theory. He does not. He ends up restating his initial line of thinking that the 'fits' were actually induced. We suspect that there is a hidden agenda to this reasoning. Even though he might be convinced that such a malady had a negative effect on the physique of the person, with Muḥammad, he had to deny this because the thesis does not fit the reality. The man was too healthy to be an epileptic.

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56 Ibid., pp. 85-86.
57 Article in ERE, pp. 874-875.

Secondly, one could argue that he hammered the issue of inducement because it offers an opportune door to criticise the revelations as simulated and therefore fake. This then raises a big question mark on the personality of Muḥammad as a whole.

3.3.2 THE REVELATION - THE HOLY QUR'ĀN.

We have tried to reason, from Margoliouth's own analysis of the health of Muḥammad that he has a particular view of the scripture of Muslims. He brings back the old theory that the Qur'ān was Muḥammad's own creation. He writes on the Qur'ānic style and deduces that

> ...the tradesman prophet could not keep free of metaphors taken from his business.[58]

The elaborate teachings of the Qur'ān in the conduct of fair business, to Margoliouth, is a sure indication that Muḥammad had a hand in its composition.

He takes up certain Qur'ānic verses and forces upon them interpretations which could serve the object of sanctioning his reasoning. He writes that Muḥammad:

> At one time... commanded his followers to make an offering to the poor before they addressed him, but this had to be rescinded.[59]

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58 Margoliouth, Moḥammed, p. 69.

59 Ibid., p. 216.

This is his interpretation of the passage in Sūrah al-Mujādalah. The passage reads:

> O ye who believe! When ye consult the Apostle in private, spend something in charity before your private consultation. That will be best for you, and most conducive to purify (of conduct). But if ye find not (the wherewithal) God is oft-forgiving, Most Merciful. Is it that ye are afraid of spending sums in charity before your private consultation (with him)? If, then, ye do not so, and God forgives you then (at least) establish regular prayer; practise regular charity; and obey God and His Apostle. And God is well-acquainted with all that ye do.[60]

The impression created by Margoliouth's assertion is that Muḥammad had to 'withdraw' the statement because it was too demanding on the people. From the Qur'ān itself, as quoted above, there is no suggestion of the statement being 'rescinded'. As it is with many other Qur'ānic statements of such nature, allowance is made for the possibility of people not being able to perform the particular action recommended. This is why it is normally argued that the Qur'ān deals with realistic issues of human life, allowing for human frailties, and does not base its arguments or injunctions on speculative and abstract theories.

Yusuf ʿAlī explains in his notes on the passage in question that human nature as it is might make some people wanting to be a bit selfish and monopolising the Prophet with their individual private concerns. This was thus a recognition of such weakness and hence the charity was meant to expiate for this. It was a way of teaching the people to purify their motives. However, in the same vein, the injunction is not put in such a way as to scare away people from the Prophet altogether. Consequently, God's magnanimity is open up to those who might not be able to offer the charity.

At the same time, the situation is almost foolproof in that since God's forgiveness is not guaranteed one hundred percent, one's own conscience becomes the measuring instrument.

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60 Sūrah al-Mujādalah: 12-13 (Q. 58:12-13), 'Abdullah Yūsuf 'Alī's translation.

Margoliouth's perception of the Qur'ān is seen again when he discusses revelations in Madīnah. He says that Muḥammad never allowed even his close companions to see the 'roots' of his revelations.[61] He refers to some scribe who

> .... is said to have gone back to paganism by observing that the prophet allowed him to write whatever he chose.[62]

It is rather unfortunate that Professor Margoliouth with all his scholarly knack could force into the Qur'ānic text interpretations which are not there. But it ties in perfectly with the low esteem he had for the Qur'ān as a revealed book and Muḥammad as its recipient.

In his article of Muḥammad in the Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, Margoliouth does not see the Qur'ān in any positive light. He says:

> ... the Qur'ān is on many grounds ill-suited for a basis of jurisprudence. It is imperfect, self contradictory, and destitute in order.[63]

In some cases he is so incensed and bent on disproving the authenticity of the Qur'ān that he chooses a language which leaves much to be desired of his calibre. He describes some of the Qur'ānic legislations as savage and stupid and mentions an instance when Muḥammad, on his death bed, attempted to formulate a new code of law for the community.[64] He comments that:

> ... to those who supposed that they had in the Qur'ān the actual word of God this utterance not unnaturally seemed delirious.[65]

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61 Margoliouth, Mohammed, p. 217.
62 Ibid., pp. 217-218.
63 ERE, p. 877.
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid.

He asserts that it is the advent of European laws which came to save the imperfection and inadequacy of the Qur'ānic codes. Until such time, Margoliouth continues, Muslims were never able to work out any sound law.[66]

Looking at Qur'ānic philosophy, the scholar doubts any firm theological foundations and even claims that the Prophet's

> ...theory of the deity is, on the whole, naively anthropomorphic; the Allah of the Qur'ān has been compared to a magnified Oriental despot.[67]

His reasoning is that Allah is made to be served by angels with Jibrīl sending communications to Muḥammad while other angels are sent to help him in his wars. These, to him are all earthly things and best refer to human conditions.

He somehow does not see the Qur'ān addressing any metaphysical issues. He writes:

> The resurrection of the body is thought of as one of bodily pains and pleasures; hence metaphysical questions concerning the soul are scarcely touched.[68]

This is a curious observation by an acclaimed scholar of Arabic who was reputed to have known Islam even better than the Muslims themselves. Just a casual look at Sūrah al-Fajr alone would convince one that the Qur'ān deals with the soul in the hereafter. The Qur'ān says:

> (To the righteous soul will be said) 'O (thou) soul in complete rest and satisfaction! Come back though to thy Lord well pleased (thyself) and well-pleasing unto Him! Enter thou, then among my devotees! Yea, enter thou My Heaven!.[69]

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66 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
68 Ibid.
69 Sūrah al-Fajr: 27-30.
See also Sūrah al-Shams: 7-10 and the Qur'ān passim.

Metaphysical questions have always been vigorously addressed by Muslim scholars - theologians and philosophers alike and we would have expected that as an eminent scholar of Islam, Margoliouth would have come across the works of al-Kindī, Ibn ʿArabī, Ibn Sīnā, Ibn Rushd, al-Fārābī, and al-Ghazzālī.[70]

3.3.3 PROPHETHOOD.

Margoliouth looks at the prophetic mission of Muḥammad and argues that the situation at that time impressed upon him the need for a prophet to fill the vacuum among the Arabs and be on equal footing with the Jews, Christians, Magians and Sabeans who all had leaders to point to. He further reasons that with the name of the Christian and Jewish God being identical with the Quraishi 'god', Muḥammad saw the opportunity of proclaiming himself as a prophet and leader. He thus sees the greatness in Muḥammad as stemming from two main things: The fact that he was able to draw

> ... the inference, and of his ability to render that knowledge effective.[71]

Muḥammad, to him therefore, is great mainly because he is a seeker who has realized the object of his search.

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70 For further insight into this subject, see contemporary works like:
Iqbal, Sir Muḥammad, Six Lectures on the Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam. (Lahore: Sh. M. Ashraf, 1982 reprint). Especially Lecture IV on 'The Human Ego - His Immortality and Freedom'.
Mahmūd, Abdel Haleem, The Creed of Islam, (London: World of Islam Festival Trust,)1978. Especially Chapter V on 'The Resurrection'.
Rahmān, Fazlur, Major Themes of the Qur'ān, (Minneapolis & Chicago: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980). Especially Chapter Two on 'Man as an Individual' and Chapter Six on 'Eschatology'.

71 Margoliouth, Moḥammed, p. 74.

He continues that the claim by Muslims that Arabia at the advent of Muḥammad was in dire need of a prophet as well as the story of happenings in the court of the ruler of Persia at the birth of Muḥammad

> ... may be dismissed as VATICINIUM POST EVENTUM.[72]

Looking at the Makkan society, the way they went to battle with vigour and enthusiasm, he sees the Makkan enjoying life exceedingly and hence concludes that they were not in need of a prophet.

The reasoning here looks a bit strange. We are of the opinion that the need for a spiritual guide has much to do with the presumed 'here and now' philosophy that physical temporal pleasures usually offer. Even though the Makkan seemed quite alright and in high spirits, there was a lot of emptiness in them which needed to be filled. The way those who embraced the nascent faith, resolved to stand by their new found way of life and never to give in to blackmail, threats and persecution, even at the pain of death, seems to belie Margoliouth's opinion.

Further, the speech of Ja'far Ibn Abī Ṭālib at the Court of al-Najāshī in Abyssinia regarding their lifestyle does not seem to suggest any pure satisfying existence.[73]

His image of Muḥammad as a prophet never seems to go beyond the level of the implausible. He writes that even though he had some impressive qualities

> .... the process of revelation was so suspicious that one of the scribes employed to take down the effusions became convinced that it was imposture and discarded Islam in consequence.[74]

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72 Ibid., p. 76. "Vaticinium Post Eventum" means literally 'prophecy after the event', i.e. 'an afterthought'.

73 For Ja'afar's speech, see Shiblī Nu'mānī, <u>Sīrat al-Nabi</u> Parts II & III, translated into English by Fazlur Rahmān, (Karachi: Pakistan Historical Society, 1970), pp. 220-221.
Ja'far, among other things, said: "O King, we were an ignorant people, who worshipped idols, at the (flesh of the) dead bodies, indulged in adultery and other evil practices, maltreated our neighbours, oppressed each other, and the strong among us destroyed the weak ..."

The issue of Muḥammad's imposture is an 'old wives tale' which has existed since the Medieval times. Margoliouth turns around to rebuff some of these Medieval ideas but keeps those which suit his thesis. He rejects the story of Muḥammad training pigeons and allowing them to pick grains from his ear while he interprets as evidence of God revealing a message to him. He cites Thomas Carlyle as one of those who pour scorn on such fanciful ideas and points out that nothing in the Muslim sources even remotely suggests this.[75]

Nevertheless, he ridicules Muḥammad's behaviour as sometimes showing evidence of knowledge of theatrical effects. He gives examples of Muḥammad allegedly claiming not to find a seat in an empty room because all were occupied by angels and turning his face away from a corpse because some two houris had come to tend the dead man - their husband. He adds that Muḥammad sometimes makes his followers believe they had seen Gabriel. When he comes across scholarly opinion to the effect that Muḥammad's personal character of honesty and sincerity were sufficient to convince people of truth in his prophethood, Margoliouth retorts with an alleged research finding. He refers to one F. Podmore who carried out a research on the history of spiritualism the findings of which:

> .... cast great doubt on the proposition that an honourable man would not mystify his followers; and also make it appear that the conviction produced by the performances of a medium is often not shaken by the clearest exposure.[76]

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74 Moḥammed, p. 89.
See also footnote 61 where he makes the same observation in his article on Muḥammad in the ERE.

75 Some of these issues have been dealt with in the earlier parts of this work. Norman Daniel says there were:

> ".... that told of a dove whom Muḥammad, or a wicked teacher of Muhammad, trained to eat grain or corn from the prophet's ear, to simulate the Holy Ghost; or of a bull, or calf, or camel, similarly trained to come at his call, bearing the Book of the Law bound in its horns".

See Norman Daniel, Islam and the West - The Making of an Image, Revised Edition, (Oxford, One World, 1993), p.52. See also pp. 15; 31; 60-61; 257; 261-262 & 266.

76 Margoliouth, Moḥammed, pp. 88-89.

Margoliouth discounts the historicity of the visit to Waraqah Ibn Naufal by Khadījah and Muḥammad in which he was said to have confirmed the authenticity of Muḥammad's experience in the cave of Ḥirā. He argues on the premise that Waraqah

> .... figures no further in the narrative.[77]

Sir Charles J. Lyall in reaction to Margoliouth's earlier article purported to explain the origins of the words 'Hanif' and 'Muslim' rebuffs the professor's arguments as untenable.[78] In his analysis Lyall gives a list of the Ḥunafā'at that time and Waraqah Ibn Naufal tops the list. He then states that:

> Warakah became a Christian and died in that faith during the fatrah or interval which elapsed between the first revelation to Muhammad (chap. xcvi of the Kuran) and that which followed it.[79]

About Waraqah, we have information that he died very early in the prophetic career of Muḥammad.[80]

One wonders whether he was needed to feature in the narratives further. We would like to argue that the fact that he does not feature in later narratives *per se* does not make him a mythical figure or cast doubts on the authenticity of earlier events he is connected with.

Margoliouth makes Muḥammad look like a sly man who always has intelligent answers up his sleeve to give, purporting them to be from the Divine. For example, in discussing the conversion of Khadījah he argues that:

> .. maternal grief over her dead sons would enter into the process of conversion.[81]

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77 Ibid., p. 92.

78 See Margoliouth, 'On the Origin and Import of the Names Muslim and Hanīf', in JRAS Vol. XXXV (July 1903), pp. 467-493.
and Lyall, 'The Words 'Hanīf' and 'Muslim'', in JRAS Vol.XXXV (1903), pp. 771-784.

79 Ibid., p. 772.

80 See The Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1953), p. 651.

To a question allegedly posed by Khadījah as to the fate of their deceased children, Muḥammad's reply came in the form of a revelation which, to Margoliouth, means if she believed then her children would be in eternal bliss and hence she submitted.[82] Margoliouth calls this:

> A brilliant answer;....[83]

thereby suggesting further a deep personal role of Muḥammad in the framing of the message of the Qur'ān. The reasoning here looks a bit ahistorical and strange since Khadījah, with all her firm affection and love for Muḥammad as a husband, could not have acted on such emotional grounds to believe in as a genuine religious experience worthy of consideration. Again, all the available narratives say that Muḥammad, from the Cave of Ḥirā, on his first terrifying experience was almost immediately taken by Khadījah to see the scripturally-learned Waraqah. The latter's reassurance and Khadījah's own early committal leaves little room for such speculation on emotional conversion. Khadījah would not have come back from that meeting and quizzed Muḥammad again before believing in him as having received a Divine message. All these arguments, no matter how implausible they might be, are calculated to achieve the aim of denying the authenticity of Muḥammad's Divine Mission.

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81 Margoliouth, Moḥammed, ., p. 93.
82 See Sūrah at-Ṭūr: 21 (Q. 52:21).
83 Margoliouth, Mohammed, Ibid.

3.3.4 SUPERSTITION AND IDOLATRY.

Margoliouth, despite all that he had read from and of Islam, sees Muḥammad as superstitious and even idolatrous. He accuses him of acting always in accordance with what he felt were good omens. He asserts that:

> of the superstitions of the Arabs, which differ slightly, if at all, from those of other races, he would seem to have imbibed a fair share.[84]

He again accuses the Prophet of believing in charms and even advocating the Lord's prayer as an antidote against diseases and misfortunes. Margoliouth claims that Muḥammad taught his people to use it the way the Christians did.[85]

Muḥammad is further charged with engaging in idolatrous rites and the scholar even claims that:

> The names of some of the children shows that their parents when they named them were idolaters.[86]

The names of the Prophet's children are given as al-Qāsim, Zaynab, Ruqayyah, Umm Kulthūm, Fāṭimah, ʿAbdullāh Ṭayyab (Ṭāhir) and Ibrāhīm. Except Ibrāhīm, who was born to Māriyah, the Copt, all the others were the children of Khadījah. From the above names, Margoliouth's deduction does not seem to have any basis since there are no indications of idolatry. Of course,

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84 Ibid., p. 61.

85 Ibid., pp. 62-63.
Margoliouth refers to the work of J.M. Robertson, A Short History of Christianity, (London: Watts & Co., 1902).
Robertson, in Part II of his book, under the general title 'Christianity from the Second Century and the Rise of Mohammedanism', discusses some rites and ceremonies over the time. He writes:

> The sign of the cross was now constantly used in the same spirit, being held potent against physical and spiritual evil alike, insofar as any such distinction was drawn. But diseases were commonly regarded as the work of the evil spirits, and medical science was generally disowned, the preferred treatment being exorcism. A baptised person might further use the Lord's Prayer with its appeal against the Evil One - a privilege denied to the Cathechumen or seeker for membership. p.125.

86 Margoliouth Mohammed, pp. 69-70.

it used to be an earlier Arabian practice to name children after one of the deities then stored in the Ka'bah, but none of the names given to the children of the Prophet bore semblance with names of deities.

Further, Margoliouth's reasoning stands against formidable evidence of the Prophet's practice in those days concerning the giving of names, a tradition which survives till this day.

The Prophet changed the names of all people who embraced Islam if those names suggested idolatry, pride, immorality and other evil values.[87] One would have therefore expected Margoliouth arguing otherwise instead of the way he does.

He claims further that Muḥammad and Khadījah:

> ....performed some domestic rite in honour of one of the goddesses each night before retiring.[88]

Again, citing from J. Wellhausen's RESTE ARABISCHEN HEIDENTUMS (Berlin, 1897) Margoliouth asserts that Muḥammad:

> .... confessed to having at one time sacrificed a grey sheep to al-Uzza - and probably did so more than once, since after his mission, he used to slaughter sheep for sacrifice with his own hands.[89]

The scholar again refers to a story in which it is alleged that the Prophet once invited Zaid b. ʿAmr , the famous monotheist of Makkah, to partake in a meal prepared with meat offered to idols. Zaid, as the story goes, refused to eat and, to Margoliouth, that made Muḥammad also refuse it and hate such food.

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87 See Doi, A.R.I., Nigerian Muslim Names - Their Meaning and Significance., (Khanpur, Ahmedabad (India), Muslim Publ. Hse., 1978).
Chapter One where the author discusses the importance of good names in Islam.

88 Moḥammed, p. 70.

89 Ibid., p. 70.

In the whole history of Muḥammad, the most dominant theme has been his inexorable stand against idolatry. The whole anger of the Quraish directed at the Prophet, and even his clan, was precisely because of this. When an appeal was made by the Quraishī chiefs to Abū Ṭālib for him to stop Muḥammad, the central issue was the Prophet's unyielding stand against idolatry. Their plea stated, among other things, that Muḥammad:

> Your nephew slanders our gods, calls our ancestors to have been misguided and looks upon us as fools.....[90]

The Prophet's celebrated and instructive answer leaves no room for anyone to doubt his principles as a man of genuine intense spirituality.[91]

In prophetic history, Ibrāhīm is known to have been an ardent iconoclast and Muḥammad is normally considered to be the closest to Ibrāhīm in that respect.[92] As Ibrāhīm destroyed the idols of his relatives, and Mūsā showed his fury against the Israelites for worshipping the golden calf, Muḥammad waged an unflinching war against idolatry. The

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90 Shiblī Nu'mānī, Sīrat al-Nabī, p. 204.
See also:
Ibn Hishām, Sīrat an-Nabawiyyah Vol. pp. 265-266.
Haykal, Muḥammad Husayn. The Life of Muḥammad, translated from the 8th. Ed. by Ismā'īl R.A. al-Fārūqī, (Indianapolis, North American Trust Publications, 1976), pp. 87-90.
Guillaume, A., The Life of Muḥammad - Translation of Ibn Isḥāq's Sīrat Rasūl Allah, (Karachi, O.U.P., 1978), pp. 118-119.
Nadwī, Abul Hasan ʿAli, Muḥammad Rasūlullah, (Lucknow, Academy of Islamic Research & Publications, 1982), pp. 112-113.

91 The Prophet is quoted to have replied to his uncle's emotional appeal thus:
"By Allah, I will not desist from performing my duties, even if these people place the sun in my one hand and the moon in the other. Either God will (make me) fulfill this mission or I will lay down my life for this (cause)".
See:
Shiblī Nu'mānī, Ibid., p. 205.

92 See Sūrahs:
al-Anʿām: 74-81 (Q. 6:74-81);
al-Anbiyā : 51-71 (Q. 21:51-71);
as-Shu'arā : 70-82 (Q. 26:70-82);
al-Ankabūt: 16-18 (Q. 29:16-18);
as-Sāffāt: 83-98 (Q. 37:83-98).

classical historical example is at the re-entry into Makkah. As Ismā'īl Rajī al-Fārūqī puts it:

> The Prophet destroyed the idols of the Ka'bah and commanded his companions to destroy all idols wherever they might be. After they destroyed the idols' physical existence, the Muslims launched a campaign against the very mention of idols and sought to wipe them out from history, literature, and indeed, from consciousness itself.[93]

Margoliouth's examples seem to suggest that the Prophet might have grown out of idolatrous practices in latter years. However, even in his youthful days there is no sustainable evidence that he ever engaged in idolatry. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ʿAzzām, points out that Muḥammad, in his youth:

> ... shared in the duties and rights of his society - except that he manifested from early years a revulsion to the worship of idols. Once when he was besought to act in the name of the gods al-Lāt and al-'Uzzā, he replied with the startling answer, 'Do not ask me anything for the sake of these idols. I have never hated anything more'.[94]

Margoliouth also refers to the Prophet's practice of kissing the black stone as another evidence of his idolatrous practice. At this point our eminent scholar has gone a bit too far in showing his rejection of even the basics of religious practice as far as Islam is concerned.

As a scholar of Islam, armed with expert knowledge in the scriptural languages of almost all major religions, one would have expected him to be aware of symbolism as an underlying factor in the expression of religious experience. From his Jewish ancestry and of course his Christian commitment we are sure he would have defended to the hilt all the daily practices of Christians using the same symbolism argument. One, therefore, cannot help but wonder why in the case of Muḥammad Margoliouth's scholarship always becomes slanted.

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93 See the translation to Haykal's The Life of Muḥammad, pp. 19-20.

94 The Eternal Message of Muḥammad, translated from the Arabic by Caesar E. Farah. A Mentor Book, (London, The New English Library Ltd., 1965), p. 29.

Even the worse enemies of Islam in his days were ready to accept the fact that the basic problem they had with Islam was its stand on idolatry and some of their ancient practices which the Prophet vehemently criticised and repeatedly called for their abandonment. Margoliouth seems to be reading some unknown material or at best his interpretation of what he reads does not conform with even that of the avowed enemies of Islam.

3.3.5 SATANIC VERSES.

A scholar's perception on a particular subject is usually betrayed by the kind of choice of themes. In the case of Margoliouth, following his earlier themes with the one above, makes him fall in a particular group who almost always denigrate Islam. We need to state that it is not necessarily the discussion of the theme itself but how it is done.

Margoliouth tries to advance some rather strange arguments to support his belief in the story. He starts that living in Abyssinia, under the patronage of the Negus, the Muslims had become a threat to the Makkans.

Therefore, the Quraish, fearing that the Abyssinians might attempt another invasion of Makkah to compensate for the last one in about 570 C.E. which failed, decided to entreat the Muslims to return. He then reasons:

> On the other hand the Prophet was probably aware that such an invasion would be a doubtful advantage to himself, since the Abyssinians would conquer, if at all, for themselves. Let Mohammed make some reasonable concession to Al-Lāt and Al-'Uzza, and Allah's prophet would be recognized. This was in effect what happened.[95]

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[95] Margoliouth, Mohammed, p. 170.

It is astonishing how such a reasoning could be made. To argue that the Prophet struck a compromise with the idolatrous beliefs of the Makkans in order to stem off an assumed resumption of Abyssinian attack looks too quaint to be reasonable. It even suggests that Muḥammad knew what the Makkans were thinking. The argument also suggests that Muḥammad was very concerned with his personal status in Makkah and indeed in Arabia since, as the statement seems to say, he did not want the Abyssinians to conquer Makkah and be left with nothing.

He then tells the story of the incident said to have brought about the Satanic Verses with some relish making it appear that the whole affair was stage-managed. He says that, after that:

> The ban on the Hashimites was withdrawn; the Abyssinian refugees returned.[96]

To him, there was nothing wrong if the story were true. He argues rather emotionally thus:

> The compromise, which to us appears wise and statesmanly, was regarded as the most discreditable episode in the prophet's career, and in the chief editions of his biography it is suppressed.

He adds:

> In the edition which preserves it Mohammed is represented as returning to Monotheism the same day.[97]

One interesting thing is that the eagerness, with which Margoliouth discusses the issue, is new. It is the attitude of the scholar measured against his standing in respected scholarly circles which makes one surprised.

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96 Ibid., p. 171.

97 Ibid. Rather than being suppressed in the major works on the Prophet's biography, Ibn Hishām, Ibn Sa'd and at-Ṭabarī all refer to the story. These are usually recognized as prominent works and Margoliouth himself mentions these in his introductory remarks to his books.

Even in those versions of the story which talk of the event inducing a return of refugees, it is stated that only some of them returned. Here, Margoliouth's version makes it appear as if the story was so widely believed that all the refugees returned.

It is not surprising that Margoliouth does not find anything wrong with the version of the story which portrays Muḥammad as lapsing into idolatry, the part that he peddles. After all, from the earlier discussions, his image of Muḥammad as a prophet is just that of a crafty brilliant man who is so intelligent that he gives pragmatic responses. He is a shrewd impostor who is quickly able to fall on any circulating piece of idea and mould it into another shape and incorporate it into a book in which he plays the main role in its composition while attributing it to a Divine source. Muḥammad, being a sort of precursor to Joseph Smith of the Mormons, to Margoliouth, it was not unusual for him to have 'compromised' on such a cardinal principle of his religion.[98]

The scholar tacitly admits that his version of the story is not what the major authentic 'chief' biographical sources provide. With his acclaimed scholarly aptitude, he should have stated why he is preferring an inferior authority in such a crucial argument. By saying that the major authentic and reliable sources 'suppress' the story, he is pronouncing a verdict impugning the reliability of these scholars. Again, he does not show his reasons for taking such a position.

The story has survived the ages and we have dealt with it in our earlier discussions.[99] Perhaps, the only addendum we can make here is that if ʿUmar's conversion induced so much fear amongst the Makkan opponents of Muḥammad, as Margoliouth himself says, then it does

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98 See infra (3.3.17) for a discussion of the equation of Muhammad to Joseph Smith - the founder of Mormonism.

99 See the Chapter on Sir William Muir.
See also, T.B. Irving, 'The Rushdie Confrontation - A Clash in Values', in Islamic Order Quarterly, 3rd. Quarter, Vol.II No. 3, (1989), pp. 43-51.

not stand in accordance with reason for the Prophet to have tried such a damaging concession. To demonstrate how much importance Margoliouth attaches to the story, he spends five good pages on it (pp. 170 - 174 inclusive) probably one of the main themes receiving the greatest attention.

3.3.6 COPYING (BORROWING).

The next theme of emphasis concerns the originality of the Prophet's message. The arguments here seem to have flowed from the earlier ones on the revelation and prophethood. The line of reasoning could be said to be basically this: if Muḥammad is an impostor and the Qur'ān is his own composition, then whatever looks acceptable in there must have come from somewhere else. Looking at the period, with a lot of Jews around and some form of Christianity, at least, in existence, he must have 'stolen' the tolerable ideas from the Scriptures of these people. Now, the Muslims say their Prophet was not learned enough to have been able to read either Greek or Hebrew. Granted that this is true, he must have either been taught by some people or more importantly heard stories from Jews and Christians.

One could argue that Margoliouth looks at the theme with this in mind. Hence, he starts by looking for that obscure teacher and finds one in the person of Waraqah. He then, without evidence, perpetuates the myth.. He writes:

> ...Warakah, son of Naufal, cousin of Khadījah, is likely to have had much to do with the beginnings of Islam . He is credited with having translated the Gospel, or part of one, into Arabic; it was probably the Gospel of the Nativity, and was afterwards useful to the prophet.[100]

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100 Margoliouth, Mohammed, p. 42.

He carries the speculative trend further that Muḥammad learnt from Jewish travellers and others he met and that accounts for the Jewish tones that are heard in the parts of the Qur'ān. From this assumption, he reasons that since parts of the Qur'ān.

> ... afterwards contained a number of phrases which even his intimate associates at Meccah did not understand......[101]

the supposition cannot be doubted.

He then catalogues a series of such expressions which he is of the opinion were 'borrowed' from Arabian Jews and Christians.[102] He then adds:

> ... a biblical scholar would have easily been able to tell the source: Moḥammed probably heard them in conversation of his pious friends and automatically adopted them.[103]

He admits there was no formal education for Muḥammad and that he did not have much of the rote learning which was a characteristic of Arab society. However, he sees Muḥammad as a man of such astuteness that nothing that he heard or saw could have escaped his mind.[104] He pictures Muḥammad as a highly intelligent person with a brilliant receptive memory who even when passing by two Jews Jabra and Yasar reading their scriptures is able to pick up a few stories and incorporate them in 'his Qur'ān'. He then asserts that Biblical similarities in the Qur'ān were:

> .....likely to have been all picked up by listening when services or Bible readings were going on.[105]

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101 Ibid., p. 59.

102 He gives examples as: "tasting of death", "to bring from darkness to light", "to pervert the straight way of God", "the trumpet shall be blown", "to roll up the heavens as a scroll is rolled up" etc. See Ibid., pp. 60-61.

103 See Ibid.

104 See Ibid., p. 59.

105 Ibid., p. 107.
See also p. 45 where the author says:
"Whatever fragments of the Old or New Testaments of the lives of the saints, of the sayings of the

Returning to the theory of Muḥammad being an epileptic, Margoliouth strives to convince the reader that he fakes the events. He argues that, following the modus operandi of the old Kāhin or the modern medium, Muḥammad induces his strange behaviour at times and claims he was receiving messages from God even though all he was doing was to recount what he had already heard from others on his travels. Themes like 'the worship of one God', 'the day of judgement', and 'the torment of hell fire' Margoliouth argues, were commonly available from Christian preachers. He is also of the opinion that the style of the Qur'ān is typically Arabian which, he says, Muḥammad had no choice but to copy.

The scholar then deigns to an unbelievable low in his interpretation of the various postures in *ṣalāh*. He argues that the *qiyām* is Jewish, *sujūd* Christian and the *julūs* a combination of both. He sees Sūrah al-Fātiḥah as modelled on the *Pater Noster* and says that the teaching of ritual purification before prayer existed in South Arabian communities long before Muḥammad. Nevertheless, he is of the opinion that Muslim *ṣalāh* possesses a military drill character.[106]

In his article on the concepts 'Muslim' and 'Hanīf' Margoliouth lays a strong foundation for this borrowing theory. His whole paper boils down to the fact that Musaylamah was the actual originator of the concepts 'Muslim' and 'Ḥanīf' and the Prophet took these from him. He reasons that much of Muḥammad's theological thinking from the beginning owes its origin to Musaylamah and even the sūrahs of the Qur'ān were modelled on Musaylamah's.

Jewish Fathers or of ordinary folklore happened to be in the prophet's memory were regarded by him as suitable matter for the Koran".

106 See Ibid., pp. 102-103.
Pater Noster - 'Our Father', is the Lord's Prayer which the Gospels say was taught by Jesus Christ.
See: Matthew 6: 91-13;
Luke 11: 2-4.

He writes that the Quraish used to ridicule the Prophet as having been under the tutelage of Musaylamah. Margoliouth accepts this to be:

> .... a fairly correct account of the facts, if we suppose Musaylimah's surahs to have been the earliest Arabic literature connected with monotheism, on which Mohammed modelled his early surahs;.....[107]

Referring to Hirschfeld and others who held similar ideas about the 'borrowing' theory he concludes that at a later stage in the development of his religion Muḥammad:

> ... found it expedient to desert Musaylimah for the Old and New Testaments and the sayings of the Jewish fathers. I fear that (he continues) in any question of literary ownership there must be a presumption against Mohammed, for in cases where we know his sources he indignantly denies the use of them; hence, where we do not know them quite certainly, there is a suspicion that he is the imitator rather than the imitated.[108]

Sir Charles Lyall has rebutted Margoliouth's argument as historically and even etymologically untenable. He argues that the supposition of Margoliouth would mean that:

> Musailimah's teaching should, for a considerable time before the appearance of Muhammad, have attained such a celebrity and extension in the Arabian Peninsula that, although the tribe to which he belonged had its settlements in al-Yamamah, ... the ideas embodied in it had made their way across to the Western Hijaz and Tihāmah, and these left in current use these words of religious import, without any trace surviving in the memory of men of their real origin.[109]

He then questions the rationale for Musaylamah waiting until about nine or ten years after the Hijrah (9 or 10 AH) before posing a challenge to Muḥammad if the 'original ideas' were his and 'stolen'. Historically, Lyall points out, only two poets of the Banī Hudhayl were known to have used the concept Ḥanīf in their poetical literature in the period of Muḥammad. He

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107 Margoliouth: 'On the Origin and Import of the names 'Muslim' and 'Hanīf'. op.cit. p. 492.

108 Ibid.

109 See Sir Charles Lyall: 'The words 'Hanif' and 'Muslim'', pp. 771-772.

mentions the names as Sakhr al-Ghayy and Abū Dhu'ayb. Sakhr, he says, was most probably a pagan, while the latter was a Muslim born in 622 AD.[110]

He cites Wellhausen pointing out that the deputation of Ḥunafā' which paid a courtesy call on Muḥammad were Christians and had the institution of priesthood.[111] Lyall then deduces that:

> With Christianity in possession, before the appearance of Musailimah as a prophet, it is difficult to believe that he was the discoverer of the 'religion of Abraham' and the propagator of the religious movement represented by the Hanifs.[112]

He subjects to critical linguistic analysis the words 'Ḥanīf' and 'Muslim' and rejects Margoliouth's reasoning as:

> .. a very singular example of extravagant conjecture.[113]

Margoliouth's charge of 'borrowing' are restated in his article on Muḥammad in the Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics. Here, he says, the Qur'ānic connection of the Ka'ba with Ibrāhīm is false and that there was a lot of accommodation as far as Jewish and pagan values were concerned and that sometimes Muḥammad disguises his borrowing with some "...serious modifications".[114]

Despite all this, Margoliouth expertly rejects any idea of Islam being close to Christianity. When Foster, in an article, suggested that Islam might be called a 'Christian heresy', Margoliouth spurned the idea arguing that at best it could be closer to Judaism at least

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110 Ibid.
111 Ibid., p. 777.
112 Ibid.
113 Ibid., p. 784.
See also pp. 779-784.
114 ERE, p. 875.

at its earlier stages.[115] However, Foster being a humble scholar had to admit his subordination to the acclaimed immense knowledge of Margoliouth.[116]

For this whole issue of Muḥammad eavesdropping and incorporating what he hears in the Qur'ān, Margoliouth himself admits that it is controversial.[117] He himself, looking at the Bible and the Qur'ān seems to have a problem sustaining his idea that Muḥammad was taught by someone. He points out some dissimilarities between the two scriptures and agrees that:

> This phenomenon almost disposes of the theory of a mentor, for no mentor could be so ignorant of the Bible.[118]

Nevertheless, he sticks to it implying he believes in it. Touching on the narratives of Moses in the Qur'ān, he is of the opinion that:

> Further conversation led him to find out rather more of the history of Moses, which he worked up into his peculiar style, and repeatedly told;....[119]

To Margoliouth, therefore, any teaching of Islam which smells of views already in existence portrays how crafty Muḥammad was in plagiarising Jewish, Christian and even pagan ideas where they suited the cause. His basic argument is that such stories were so common that

> ...it required no Christian interposition to reproduce.[120]

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115 See Frank Hugh Foster: 'Is Islam a Christian Heresy' esp. pp. 128-130; and: Margoliouth's criticism in his article also bearing the same title. (vide supra. footnote 26 of this Chapter).
116 vide supra. footnote 27.
117 Margoliouth, Mohammed, p. 61.
118 Ibid., p. 107.
119 Ibid., p. 131.
120 Ibid., p. 135.

Even though, the scholar is apparently silent on the implications of these 'thefts' and 'borrowings' on the general reputation of the Prophet the most logically discernible inference is the negative one.

It is quite logical for the themes of the preaching of Muḥammad to have followed the common subjects of earlier preachers. This, in itself, does not necessarily mean that he copied from or merely reproduced what he heard from the Jews and Christians. It defies any reasonable explanation why, if Muḥammad just reproduced what he heard, the Qur'an concentrates its strongest critique on the most important doctrine of Christianity - the Trinity. This is a stronger indication of the independent mindedness of Muḥammad than anything else.

The argument that only heretical Christians used to live in that area at that time is highly contentious and might even be said to be indicative of arrogant spirituality on the part of its perpetrators. Foster suggests that the type of Christian ideas Muḥammad received were from the Gnostics thereby 'pardoning' him for his obvious 'ignorance' of central doctrines.[121] In fact, Margoliouth himself shares a similar view that the Christians in those days were not that committed and in many cases not very different from the heathen.[122]

Further, Robertson's analysis of 'Christianity from the Second Century to the Rise of Mohammedanism' lists a host of alleged practices of Arabian Christians at the time of Muḥammad which were a parody of genuine Christian life.[123]

Whatever it is, some of the differences between the basics of Christianity and what one reads in the Qur'ān are too diverse to attribute them to even the worst Christian. In a situation

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121 See F.H. Foster, 'Is Islam a Christian Heresy' esp. pp. 128-132.
122 See Margoliouth, Mohammed esp. pp. 35-40.
123 See J.M. Robertson, A Short History of Christianity Part II.

where the people had priests and other institutions of the Church, it is a bit too much to imply that all these differences owe their source to the garbled Christianity at that time.

The most disturbing point in this whole deduction of 'borrowing' is not so much that it charges Muhammad with lack of originality in his prophetic career but the implicit suggestion that whoever introduces a 'new' faith must present teachings completely dissimilar to existing ones. In fact in the Muslim view the whole purpose of God sending prophets to humankind has always been largely to continue reminding people to keep in line with earlier Divine teachings.[124] Therefore, if God is One, then His message must invariably be one even though the mode or tone of it might differ from one epoch to another. There is therefore not much to choose between prophets *qua* prophets. For this very reason, the Qur'ān makes it absolutely clear that believing in all the prophets of God lies at the essence of Islam. One's faith is therefore questionable if one picks and chooses among the prophets.[125]

It hence stands perfectly to reason that God speaks to prophet 'x' and reveals the same issue to prophet 'y' albeit there are some variations. If such variations are so serious to amount to completely different message, it could be argued that a serious check has to be made of the form in which the old version have existed over the years.[126]

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124 See: Sūrah al-Anʿām: 48, 31 (Q. 6:31, 48).
Sūrah Ibrāhīm: 4-6 (Q. 14:4-6).
Also: Abūl Hassan ʿAlī Nadwī: Prophethood in Islam passim.
Roston Pike: Encyclopedia of Religion and Religions, (London: George Allen & Unwin), 1951, p. 308.
Encyclopedia Judaica vol. 13, pp. 1150-1181, on 'Prophets and Prophecies'.

125 See: Sūrah al-Baqarah: 285 (Q. 2:285);
then vv. 136, 253 of the same surah.
Surah al-Nisāa': 150-152 (Q. 4:150-152).
In fact, in the last passage, those who pick and choose are described as unbelievers.

126 This raises the issue of Tahrīf (Manipulation, Perversion) in Islamic critique.
See: Sūrah al-Baqarah: 42, 75, 174;
Sūrah al-'Imrān: 71;
Sūrah al-Nisāa': 46;
Sūrah al-Mā'idah: 14-14.
Also see: Abdel Majid Charfi: 'Christianity in the Qur'ān Commentary of Tabari' in Islamo Christiana Vol. 6, (1980), pp. 105-148.

3.3.7 MORALITY.

The personal probity of Muḥammad has been put into a very serious doubt by Margoliouth. After discussing the moral precepts introduced by Muḥammad, the scholar sees:

> .... no evidence that the Moslems were either in personal or altruistic morality better than the pagans.[127]

He however contradicts himself by admitting that:

> There can be no doubt, however, that the liability to persecution under which the Moslems suffered led to a more stringent morality on their part than they had previously practised;...[128]

He calls Muḥammad the "head of a robber community whose teachings included lying and treachery".[129]

Margoliouth accuses Muḥammad of being a 'cattle thief' whose activities were acceptable to the tribesmen who themselves followed basic instincts. The scholar's contempt for Muḥammad becomes more apparent in the way he describes the events which took place in Makkah when the Prophet and his followers re-entered the city in about 630 AD (8 AH). He refers to some pictures which were effaced and then says:

> ... whom or what they represented we know only on Mohammed's authority, which we are not inclined to trust;....[130]

He agrees that the Prophet spared all his enemies in Makkah but something was needed to explain this 'strange' behaviour of a man who he has described as 'robber-chief', 'cattle-thief' and untrustworthy. He finds the rationale that it was just because the Prophet was not content

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M.H. Ananikian: 'Tahrif or the Alteration of the Bible according to the Muslems' in MW Vol. XIV (1924), pp. 61-84.

127 Margoliouth, Mohammed, p. 149.

128 Ibid., pp. 150-151.

129 Ibid., p. 149.

130 Ibid., p. 387.

with Makkah in his laps. It was 'self-gratification' more than mere clemency which actually led to that behaviour, he suggests.[131]

He further puts up the rather strange opinion that Muḥammad instituted the *zakāh* just to make up for the shortfall in the state treasury since the Jews he used to 'rob' were no more available, "having all been either massacred or despoiled".[132] This is another of Margoliouth's curious deductions.

Payment of *zakāh* or even the voluntary *ṣadaqah* has been part of the Islamic faith right from its inception. In fact, *zakāh* is next only to *ṣalāh* as a principle of *īmān*. In many places in the Qur'ān the two are mentioned together, the former following the latter. The institution of *zakāh* was therefore in the Makkan period as the Qur'ānic references indicate.[133] It is therefore strange that Margoliouth talks of Madīnan issues in the Makkan period. At least, historically, this is erroneous.

Margoliouth further portrays Muḥammad as being more interested in material wealth, booty, than anything else. He claims that the Prophet initially had the idea of keeping all booty purporting to be doing so on behalf of God but due to some inducement, he agreed to keep only a fifth.[134] He however leaves his reader in the dark as to the source of his information and on whose inducement he more or less capitulated. Granting that there was any truth in this version of things, if Muḥammad were that greedy and wanted to keep all, it would have taken more

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131 Ibid., p. 388.

132 Ibid., p. 413.

133 See: Sūrah al-Baqarah: 43 (Q. 2:43);
and also vv. 110, 177 & 277.
Sūrah al-Nisāa': 162 (Q. 4:162);
Sūrah al-Māidah: 58 (Q. 5:58).
For further reading on *zakah* see:
G. de Zayas Farishta, The Law and Philosophy of Zakat Vol. 1 edited by A.Z. Abbasī, (Damascus: Jami' al-Huqūq Mahfūzah al-Mu'lafah, 1960).
As-Sayyid Ṣābiq: Fiqh-us-Sunnah Vol. III, Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1986, esp. Part 1 on *az-zakāh*.

134 See Margoliouth, Mohammed, p. 272.

than human conviction for him to give up as much as eighty percent. Unless, of course, Margoliouth accepts that Muḥammad at least in this particular case, received genuine Divine intervention , it would be difficult to prove what prevailed upon Muḥammad. But how can the scholar come back to accept that Muḥammad had received genuine Divine word after all that has been said about his prophethic career? He therefore concludes that the best possible explanation would be that the fifth compares well with that enjoyed by pre-Islamic sovereigns even though theirs was a bit higher - a fourth.[135]

He returns to the story of re-entry of Makkah and seems to distrust any account that looks favourable to Muḥammad[136] but at the same time admitting that:

> If Moḥammed took anything from Meccah, he gave it more.[137]

From the following pages after this statement, one reads his meaning of what Muḥammad gave to Makkah. The whole idea is couched in materialistic motives. It reinforces his earlier reasoning of lack of genuine spirituality in Muḥammad's teaching and that his whole life is fraught with immoral undertones.[138]

In his article on Muḥammad in the Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics supposedly relying on the work of Ibn Isḥāq, Margoliouth concludes that:

> The stories of his successes... indicate a complete absence of moral scruple; but they also show a combination of patience, courage, and caution, ability to seize opportunities, and distrust of loyalty when not backed by interest, ...[139]

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135 Ibid.
136 See Ibid., pp. 389-390.
137 Ibid., p. 393.
138 See Ibid., pp. 393-394.
139 ERE, p. 873.

He is more caustic in his attack in his sermon entitled 'The failure of Islam'. He says:

> That career, to those who care to read the original authorities, represents one which has few equals in its atrocity: to suppose that God could have directly employed such a servant as that is to blaspheme....The mischief that is done by such a man as the founder of Islam being made a pattern of conduct is incalculable.[140]

The tone of this statement is not very different from the 'war propaganda' period of the Medieval times. Its survival in Margoliouth is a serious indictment on his scholarship.

3.3.8 SEXUALITY/SENSUALITY.

This has been a favourite theme for Western scholars on the biography of the Prophet. Norman Daniel in his Islam and the West - The Making of an Image gives us a detailed account of some of the Medieval charges on Muḥammad's sexuality and how these have come to survive the ages even into the period of so-called enlightened scholarship or perspicacious research.[141] Margoliouth follows some of these survived images.

In order to establish a good foundation for his reasoning, Margoliouth, relying on the Talmud, says that in the field of sexual passion, nine parts were given to the Arabs and only one part to the rest of mankind.[142]

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140 See the CMI, vol. 51, p. 244.
As we have already intimated, we are cognizant of the church atmosphere and the expectations of those in the pews at the St. Aldate's Church, Oxford, where the sermon was given. Nevertheless, we expected a more sober reflectoin from a scholar of Margoliouth's calibre.
Vide supra Section 3.2.1 - discussion on the sources of Margoliouth.

141 See Islam and the West esp. pp. 167-169, 265, 269-270, 292, 298, 306, 311, 351-353 & 381-384.

142 Margoliouth, Moḥammed, p. 66.
This sounds very much an anti-Arab sneer from the Jews which is unproven and unprovable. Margoliouth however believes in it first perhaps because of his Jewish background and second and more importantly, it fits his purpose.

He starts on a comparatively sympathetic note disputing the usual charge by European scholars as to the motives for the Prophet's multiple marriages. He rejects the charge of pure blind passion arguing that they were:

> ...mainly dictated by motives of a less coarse kind.[143]

He mentions three basic reasons: political alliance, cementing of relationship and the strong desire for a son.[144]

The scholar acknowledges the Prophet's remarkable temperance during his marriage to Khadījah but only because he was awaiting

> ... the favourable moment before putting any plan into execution.[145]

Margoliouth's interpretation seems to suggest that the restraint was merely a ploy in order to unleash his real self at the opportune time. The scholar presents the traditional narrative of Quraishī attractions offered to Muḥammad through his uncle Abū Ṭālib to dissuade him from his mission, which the Prophet declined, as legends not worthy of credence.[146] He does not explain fully as to why he disbelieves the account except a rather feeble statement that:

> After the part of divine ambassador had been acted for ten years with very considerable success it could not well be given up.[147]

However an 'impostor' like Muḥammad who has no well-grounded principle, as his earlier discussions seem to portray, could have easily given up the vocation when such incredible enticement was laid at his doorstep.

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143 Ibid., p. 176.
144 Ibid., pp. 176-177.
145 Ibid.
146 Ibid., p. 183;
See also supra footnotes 89 and 90.
147 Ibid., p. 184.

He takes up the marriage of ʿĀishah and describes her as someone whose malevolent nature caused a lot of problems for the Prophet in his household which he could not control. He explains that that is the reason why the Prophet had to resort to the drawing of lots in order to find out who would be travelling with him on a particular journey.[148]

All these form a prelude to the 'Necklace Affair' thus indirectly preparing the reader for his interpretation of the story. After briefly relating the story, he writes:

> Why evil should have been thought of what seems to us a perfectly natural occurrence we know not, but we must remember that the Moslem mind had by this time been somewhat tainted by licentiousness, whence any meeting between persons of different sex gave rise to sinister rumours.[149]

The discussion takes up four pages which is indicative of how important it is to the scholar's cause. Margoliouth described ʿĀishah as a:

> ...blooming girl who claimed premiership in the harem, the pert minx, as others called her, who made some many victims of her laziness and her caprices, who even made the prophet feel that he was her father's debtor.[150]

He does not offer any justification for this attack and the portrayal of Muḥammad as clinging to a woman of such nature. With what we know of ʿĀʾisha's character from the Muslim sources, which Margoliouth of course would spurn, this opinion is rather untenable.

The scholar goes on to make a claim that when people detected the human weakness of Muḥammad, which he believes was sex, women..

> ... from various parts of Arabia or the husbands of fair and fruitful women offered to hand them over to the prophet...[151]

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148 See Ibid., pp. 340-341.
149 Ibid.
150 Ibid., p. 343.
151 Ibid., p. 351.

He continues that:

> ... and indeed at Medinah, whenever a woman became a widow, her relations would not find her a husband before asking whether the prophet wanted her.[152]

Again, on the presentation of Māriyah the Copt to Muḥammad, the scholar almost reels with laughter. He taunts:

> ... concubines would have been a suitable present for Achilles, but how come the Alexendrian to know that they were equally suitable for the founder of a new religion?[153]

Margoliouth is in no mood to attribute any understanding to the Prophet's sexual relationship except that he was licentious and hence the so-called teaching of unlimited concubinage was a reflection of Muḥammad's own preference.[154]

With all that is said about Muḥammad, we read of the narrative concerning the marriage feast of Maymūna the last wife of the Prophet, which the Makkans refused the Prophet permission to celebrate in the city because he had been allowed only three days to remain in the city. The Prophet agrees. Margoliouth is silent on the implication of this on the character of the Prophet. In actual fact he does not even mention Maymūna's name in the historical setting in which she appears - the first ʿUmrah.[155]

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152 Ibid., pp. 351-352.

153 Ibid., p. 369.

154 See his article on Muḥammad in the ERE.

155 See Margoliouth Moḥammed, pp. 371-372. This incident is indicative of the Prophet's sincerity and the fact that he was not a man of pleasure and the flesh as he is being depicted tobe.
For further reading on the postponement of the wedding feast see;
Guillaume's translation of Ibn Ishaq's Sirāt Rasūl Allah, p. 531;
Fārūqī's translation of Haykal's Life of Muḥammad, pp. 384-385;
Martin Lings: Muḥammad - His Life based on the Earliest Sources, (Londo:, Islamic Texts Society and George Allen & Unwin, 1983), Chpt. LXXII esp. pp. 281-282.

3.3.9 VIOLENCE.

The accusation of violence has always been at the root of almost all the attacks on Islam as a genuine faith and Muḥammad as a recipient of Divine revelation. Norman Daniel devotes a whole chapter to it cataloguing a series of events which shows, as his title indicates 'The Place of Violence and Power in the Attack on Islam'.[156] This subculture has had a lot of influence on Sir William Muir and now even Margoliouth could not evade it.

In one of his opening discussions on the theme, the scholar says that Muḥammad was so intemperate that:

> ... his temper in debate was not easily controlled, and he was apt to give violent and insulting answers to questioners.[157]

This reasoning of Margoliouth is a bit strange considering the amount of material available on Muḥammad as far as self-comportment is concerned. This is certainly not a general characteristic of Muḥammad. Nobody can argue, for example, that Jesus was violent in the way he chased out the gamblers and traders from the Temple in Jerusalem.[158] As far as the usage of language was concerned, Muḥammad was never known to have used foul expressions.

A statement attributed to ʿAlī, probably one of those closest to the Prophet, says:

> He was predisposed to refrain from unseemly language, curses and revilings and deeds shameful; in no wise he said or did anything proper; he never raised his voice in a market place, ...[159]

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156 See Islam and the West, Chapter 3.
157 Margoliouth, Mohammed, p. 127.
158 See: Matthew 21;12-13;
Mark 11:15-17;
Luke 19: 45-46.
159 Cited in Abul Hassan ʿAlī Nadwī: Muḥammad Rasūlullah, p. 412.
See also: Saiyid Sulaimān Nadwī: Muḥammad - the Ideal Prophet translated by Mohiuddīn Aḥmad, (Lucknow (India): Academy of Islamic Research and Publications, 1981), esp. Chpt. IV.

Unfortunately, due to his thesis, Margoliouth would describe such statements as mere propaganda. However, the original sources he claims to depend upon contain evidence of this except that his interpretation is something else.

The testimony that the Prophet had from those who knew him best was such that if he were to have the character being depicted by Margoliouth he would have had his reputation irreparably damaged.

The scholar presents a questionable interpretation of a passage in Sūrah al 'An'ām. The text says:

> When thou seest men engaged in vain discourse about Our signs, turn away from them unless they turn to a different theme. If Satan ever makes thee forget, then after recollection, sit not thou in the company of those who do wrong.[160]

Margoliouth interprets this to mean the Prophet was asked to avoid questions and not discuss issues with unbelievers.

We are of the humble opinion that a simple reflection would show that what the Qur'ān is talking about here is an insulting, useless, time-wasting ridiculing of truth. The type of

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160 Sūrah al-'Anām: 68 (Q. 6:68).
Mawlānā Abul Kalām Azad explains:

> "When people who have no urge to seek out truth and who try to twist it to serve their purposes indulge in spurious argumentation, it would be well for the truth loving to keep aloof of them; for, truth does not emerge through wilful controversy over it".

See his: The Tarjumān al-Qur'ān edited and translated by Syed Abdul Latīf, vol. 2, (London: Asia Publishing House, 1967), p. 353.
Mawlānā Syed Abul 'A'la Maudūdī also explicates that the main duty of the believers is to present the truth to the unbelievers but if they reject they:

> "... should not waste their time and energy by entering into useless polemical disputes, discussions and argumentations with disbelievers".

See his: The Meaning of the Qurān vol. III, (Lahore: Islamic Publications Ltd., 1972) p. 119, footnote 45. In fact, the Qur'ān makes this a principle that arguments must always serve a useful purpose not for the mere sake of it or to cause strife in society. See: Sūrah 16:125; 29:46.

irresponsible debates the enemies of Islam might try to initiate merely to provoke and put Islam in derision is what is being referred to here.

The scholar further argues that the sovereign power enjoyed by Muḥammad created what he sees as tyranny. He writes:

> Let one man be given absolute and uncontrolled authority in a community, a number of parasites are sure to arise, ready to plunge into any sort of mire in the hope of gaining a smile from their master.[161]

When Asmā' bint Marwān a leading member of the taunting group was executed for leading a plot to murder the Prophet, Margoliouth acknowledges that:

> Since ... she had deliberately incited the people of Medinah to a murderous attack on the prophet, her execution would not have been an inexcusably ruthless measure, judged by any standards; and it must not be forgotten that satire was a far more effective weapon in Arabia than elsewhere; ...[162]

Immediately after this, however, he writes again:

> The employment of the assassin where the executioner might reasonably have been employed is what excites horror.[163]

He then mentions in the footnote that both Sprenger and Muir condemn such incidents as inhuman.

The interest in the incidents is sustained further in arguing that the fact that only the satirist suffered whatever punishment was meted out shows a remarkable improvement on existing practice in which whole families or tribes of the culprits had to brace themselves for attacks.

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161 Margoliouth, Mohammed, p. 276.
162 Ibid., p. 278.
163 Ibid., p. 279.

He however shows his dislike for stories that are in favour of Muḥammad by doubting whether the:

... verses ascribed to Asmā' be genuine... [164]

Attention now shifts onto an anecdote concerning ʿAlī and Ḥamzah. Ḥamzah was supposed to have killed two camels belonging to ʿAlī, due to drunkenness. These camels were supposed to be used on some trading arrangement that ʿAlī had struck with the Banū Qaynuqāʿ. The incident, according to Margoliouth, became a big embarrassment to the Prophet. The scholar, admitting problems in getting authorities for some details of his story then adds that:

A few more steps we must ourselves supply.[165]

The details he needed to supply ended with the conclusion that the Muslims were ordered to attack the Jews to compensate for ʿAlī's loss as a result of Ḥamza's insobriety. Thus, he continues, prohibition of wine which was to destroy one of the main areas of trading by the Jews, offered itself to be the plausible alternative and hence a revelation was brought.[166]

Without offering any other explanation other than making the Prophet and his close relatives look mean - Ḥamza drunk, ʿAlī irritated and the Prophet annoyed - the scholar just concludes with the Muslims attacking the Jews.

One cannot think of any other reason why Margoliouth thinks that this kind of reasoning should be acceptable as sound. With the Banū Qaynuqā, the trade partners of ʿAlī having kept their part of the agreement by loading the camels, how could Muḥammad, hitherto described as a shrewd man who always acted for his own political advantage, act like that?

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164 Ibid., p. 278.
165 Ibid., p. 281.
166 Ibid., pp. 282-283.

Margoliouth shows much interest in the story of Ka'b Ibn al-Ashraf of the Banū Naḏir who ostensibly tried to arrange for Makkan attack. Muḥammad is said to have expressed the wish that he should be slain and this was carried out in the dead of the night when he was allegedly invited out by five young men led by Muḥammad Ibn Maslamah.[167]

The scholar himself relates another version of the story which he says:

> .. increases the horror by making two of the assassins Ka'b's foster-brothers,...[168]

and questions how Madīnans became foster-brothers to a Jew. He does not realise that this could come about through *ta'ākhī.*

Furthermore, one Mahīsah, a Khazrajite, was supposed to have killed a Jew called Ibn Subainah following a declaration by Muḥammad that Jews were outlawed.

> ... giving any Moslem who found one the right to kill him.[169]

A brother of Mahīsah is said to have been so much impressed by the loftiness of Islam because of that killing that he accepted Islam. Perhaps, sensing the improbability of much of the way the arguments were going, the scholar seeks to ameliorate the situation. He breaks the scene with a statement that:

> Without fresh orders from the prophet, the Jews could not have continued to remain in Medinah.[170]

The chapter discussing the prelude to the capitulation of Makkah begins with an accusation that the Prophet was in for schemes of avengement and conquest of more territories now that his

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167 Ibid., pp. 286-287.
168 Ibid.
169 Ibid., p. 288.
170 Ibid.

mortal enemies at Madīnah were no more a problem. He makes mention of the expedition to the Banū Lihyān and claims that in a "... demonstration of force..." the Prophet marched towards Makkah with 200 people to intimidate the people.[171] The event of Khaibar, to Margoliouth, was a signal to the whole world that it was in danger of being engulfed by Islam. He reserves perhaps his bitterest attack yet on Muḥammad here accusing him of living "...by robbery and brigandage..."[172] He argues that there was no reasonable justification for the expedition to Khaibar except:

> ... because there was booty to be acquired there, and the plea for attacking it was that its inhabitants were not Moslems.[173]

He claims that the objective of the Khaibar expedition led by 'Alī was to force the people there into Islam.

The scholar continues that the Prophet now abandoned his toleration of the Jews and other people and became infused with the passion of blood thirsty assault. on communities that had not accepted Islam. He compares what he sees as the Prophet's zeal for dominating the world to Alexander or Napoleon.[174]

In his sermon at the St. Aldate's Church, Margoliouth again assails Muḥammad with preaching a violent faith. He says:

> Those passions which religion is so much concerned with restraining are constantly let loose. There is nothing incongruous about the association of religious leadership with rapine and violence to those whose ideas have been formed on the life of the prophet of Islam.[175]

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171 Ibid., p. 338.
172 Ibid., p. 362.
173 Ibid., p. 363. See Shibli Nu'mani's explanation in his Sirat al-Nabi, p. 156ff.
174 Margoliouth, Mohammed, p. 363.
175 See CMI vol. 5, (1900), p. 245.

The so-called violence of Islam has often been said to be the secret of its success. Margoliouth regurgitates this much debunked theory. He writes:

> The fact of primarily importance in the rise of Islam is that the movement became considerable only when its originator was able to draw the sword and handle it successfully.[176]

His calumniation continues that Muḥammad:

> ...organizes assassinations and wholesale massacres. His career as tyrant of Medina is that of a robber chief, whose political economy consists in securing and dividing plunder, the distribution of the latter being at times carried out on principles which fail to satisfy his followers' ideas of justice.[177]

Throughout the discussions, Margoliouth has never given any thought to self-defensive acts by Muḥammad and his followers to protect their persons and the nascent Islam. With all that the Qur'ān teaches about the freedom of religion and the documented evidence of the Prophet's advice to the preachers of Islam to just present the message and allow the people to decide for themselves, Margoliouth avoids them.[178] At the time of Margoliouth's writing, Cheragh 'Alī's work on the Jihād might have been on the market and with his position in the field of Islamic Studies, he should have been aware. In this work, Cherāgh 'Alī argues *in*

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176 ERE, p. 873.
177 Ibid., p. 878.
178 See: Sūrah al-Baqarah: 256 (Q. 2:256);
Sūrah al'Imrān: 20, 104, 110 (Q. 3:20, 104, 110);
Sūrah at-Tawbah: 6 (Q. 9:6);
Sūrah Yūnus: 99 (Q. 10:99);
Sūrah an-Nahl: 125 (Q. 16:125);
Sūrah al-Hajj: 68-70 (Q. 22:68-70);
Sūrah ash-Shūrā: 13-15 (Q. 42: 13-15);
Sūrah al-Muzzammil: 10-11 (Q. 73:10-11);
Sūrah al-Ghāshiyyah: 20-26 (Q. 88:20-26).
See also T.W. Arnold, The Preaching of Islam, (Westminster, Archibald Constable & Co., 1896), esp. Chp1, II and passim.

extenso that the wars fought by Muḥammad were generally defensive and he did not violate Qur'ānic injunctions on aggression and compulsion in conversion.[179]

3.3.10 BRIBERY.

This theme follows on the general discussion under the image of Muḥammad and how repugnant his teachings are. The general deduction is that because of the nature of the man and his religion, bribery had to be resorted to failing which, of course, as discussed, force had to be used in the religion's propagation.

In our earlier analysis we made mention of how Margoliouth interprets the commitment of Khadījah to her husband's faith. He accuses Muḥammad of resorting to emotional psychological influence on a poor woman in distress having lost her children.[180]

The scholar then takes the conversion of 'Uthmān ibn ʿAffān and advances an argument that he also accepted Islam because Muḥammad 'bribed' him with his daughter Ruqayyah. Abū Bakr was supposed to have been the broker of the deal. He presents the story in such a way that it looks as if Muḥammad agreed to the deal within a few seconds' briefing by Abū Bakr after the latter had already obtained a commitment from 'Uthmān. He writes that while Abū Bakr and 'Uthmān were discussing the issue:

> Mohammed presently passed by. Abu Bakr whispered something into his ear and the affair was arranged. Othmān became a believer and Rukayyah became his wife.[181]

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179 See M. Cherāgh ʿAlī, A Critical Examination of the Popular Jihad, (Calcutta, Thacker, Spink & Co. 1885), esp. p. 91 and pp. 55-91.
See also Ḥasan Moinuddin, The Charter of the Islamic Conference and Legal Framework of Economic Co-operation among its Member States (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), esp. Chpt 2 on 'Islam and International Law'.

180 vide supra, Sect. 3.3.3.

181 Margoliouth, Mohammed, p. 97.

Margoliouth however, seems to contradict his own theory by writing immediately after this that it was the slaves, the underprivileged and the poor and the needy in the society who were readily converted. But 'Uthmān Ibn ʿAffān, as the scholar himself admits, was a cloth merchant and also a money lender. He was not the sort of person who would have succumbed to the 'religion of the poor, the needy, the underprivileged and the slaves' if material and other worldly gains were the main attractions.

Definitely, something deeper than mere Ruqayyah would have played the main role in 'Uthmān's conversion and Muḥammad himself rather made appeals centred on otherworldly gains as against those of the here and now.

The scholar claims that:

> When men were asked what first led them to Mohammed, they were apt to give fantastic answers; perhaps they had forgotten the real motive or preferred to conceal it.[182]

It is strange that Margoliouth does not want to attribute any other reason to people's acceptance of Islam other than some material gains. It is very difficult, if not impossible, for anyone to stand outside the convert and rationalise why he converted. Religious experience as we know is a personal encounter which is often difficult for even the experiencer to explain. Margoliouth, in his position, should have been aware of this. The concern expressed here over stories like this is basically because they carry an underlying tone of Muḥammad being a materialist, sensual, fraudulent offering mundane baits to attract people into Islam.

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182 Ibid., p. 98.

Margoliouth is more forthright in writing:

> ... the religion which is embraced for sordid motives is often retained for honourable reasons; and early observers found that among the most sincere believers in Islam were persons who had been lured into it by bribes.[183]

On the fall of Makkah, the scholar is presented with an enigma. The kind of Muḥammad he knows who is savage and vengeful with all those he disliked is offering complete amnesty. He however wriggles out of the problem by pointing out that:

> Our wonder is not that Moḥammed easily took Meccah ...., but that he had to conciliate so many of his old opponents with bribes.[184]

He concludes his deliberation on this theme with a reflection on the distribution of the spoils of war after the encounter of Hunain. He charges that in the exercise, those enemies of his who had not become Muslims were offered bribes of camels to embrace Islam. He takes the alleged explanation given by the Prophet that the new converts needed to be confirmed in their newly found belief as nothing but an admission of bribery.[185] Nevertheless, he admits that:

> The motives which dictated this strange policy are hard to fathom: ill-gotten gains are consumed too quickly for us to suppose he had hoped to win the permanent gratitude of his former enemies by such bribes:...[186]

This statement puts the whole charge of bribery into doubt. Force and bribery turn the heads of people and definitely not the hearts. We therefore submit that the conviction to become Muslims was deeply reflected upon and conclusion arrived at. With all the difficult moments

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183 Ibid., p. 114.
184 Ibid., p. 376.
185 See Ibid., p. 407.
186 Ibid.

Muslims were going through in those early days people must have made conscious efforts to embrace Islam knowing very well the kind of risks they were putting themselves and even their families into.

Margoliouth's interpretation of these events is ingenious but it is not an appropriate depiction of real events. We do not really know for how long Muḥammad would have continued to bribe his followers in order for them to remain firm in Islam. The scholar does not find it necessary to consider this.

3.3.11 THE MADINAN CHARTER.

Touching on the Madīnan Charter, Margoliouth, following Wellhausen, does not dispute its authenticity but doubts its importance as it was quoted in the various disputes which occurred later. He does not believe that a mere 'treaty' as that of Madīna, carried the force of law to be referred to when judging the behaviour of the people. He finds it difficult to understand why the Prophet produced such a document and not a Divine revelation.

The reasoning here goes back to the recurring argument that the revelations were the Prophet's own given the cloak of 'the Word of God'. He however admits that:

> ... the prophet displayed so much caution that he was perhaps unwilling to put into the mouth of God concessions the withdrawal of which he may have contemplated from the first.[187]

Admitting that the Charter was meant to effect better relationships among the various groups in the city, he briefly mentions some of the injunctions especially the one on the joint effort for security.

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187 Ibid., pp. 227-228.

Hence, an important document like this which has been talked of as the first written constitution of the world and indicative of Muḥammad's diplomatic prowess is literally dismissed.[188]

Margoliouth seems to look for 'juicy' themes which would afford him the best opportunity for criticism.

3.3.12 THE JEWISH QUESTION.

A reader of Margoliouth on the above theme would have to take a serious factor into consideration - his Jewishness. Even though, perhaps, because both his father and uncle converted to Christianity, he himself grew up a Christian, the natural Jewish attachment and sympathies would always be there.

Despite this, his stature in academia was such that one would have expected him to have overgrown some of the petty commiserations that we find in his works. Some of them are too unguarded to escape notice.

He begins his discussion on the Jews by referring to the incident of the bursting of the Ma'rib dam, the consequent dispersal of tribes around the area of Yathrib. The Jewish tribes, who happened to be wealthy had a lot of problems with some of the local tribes. He mentions one Khazrajite Mālik Ibn ʿAjlān who killed a lot of Jews.

On why the Madīnan tribes approached Muḥammad and accepted him as their leader, Margoliouth argues that they did so in order to outwit the Jews who, they supposed, might go for him. He says the Khazrajites had been defeated in a battle by the united efforts of the Jews

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188 See Muḥammad Hamīdullah, The First Written Consitution in the World.
Afzal Iqbāl, Diplomacy in Early Islam.
Abdulrahmān Abdulkādir Kurdī, The Islamic State: A study based on the Islamic Holy Constitution, (London & New York, Mansell, 1984). See esp. the Appendix entitled: 'The Declaration of Medina', pp. 131-137.

and the Aus. The Khazrajites therefore speculated that since the Jews always talked of an expected Messiah who was to come and fight for them, and since from their own assessment, what they heard of Muḥammad suggested him like the expected one, they thought it would be wise to win him before the Jews did.

He continues that the Jews had also thought it was their God who helped them to win the war of Bu'ath against the Banū Khazraj. Hence, the thought of securing the help of the 'Jewish God' as well, because Muḥammad had proclaimed himself to have been sent by the same God.

Margoliouth explains the background history further that the Jews were initially happy with Islam because some of the basic teachings were akin to what they themselves believed in. Examples are given as: The Unity of God, hatred of idols, the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead and the fact that the Muslims prayed towards Jerusalem.

The tone then changes and now he dwells on the subject of Muḥammad's alleged attempt to appease the Jews so that they would recognize him as the expected prophet. He then writes:

> If the Old and New Testaments are trustworthy, even prophets who could produce the most authentic credentials had little chance with the Jews; hence Moḥammed, who had none that the Jews would recognize, had no chance with them.[189]

Margoliouth is more forthright here perhaps than before denying the essence of Muḥammad's authenticity because he did not possess the expected 'credentials'. The point is that the authenticity or not of Muḥammad's prophethood did not hang in the hands of the Jews. But the issue is clear, to Margoliouth, his Jewish bias tells him that anyone not sanctioned by the Jews

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189 Margoliouth, Moḥammed, pp. 226-227.

could not be genuine. If we take this for granted, we might have a problem with Jesus Christ as well.

The argument then moves onto the relationship with the Jews. Here, the scholar mentions a few of the attempts supposed to have been made by Jews in undermining the Prophet's mission. This, according to him, was primarily because they were envious that:

> Moḥammed's power had been won by his use of their Bible; of which he had not a beginner's knowledge as compared with them.[190]

He claims that it was the Jews who passed on information about prophets, angels, revelation and other things with Muhammad himself depending upon Jewish Witnesses.

He somehow turns round to criticise them for pouring scorn on Muḥammad about some of his teachings even though their own scripture (the Old Testament) did not vary too much. He mentions the Jews being furious when the Prophet ordered an adulterer to be stoned even though their own scripture teaches the same punishment.

Again, he criticises the Jews for ignoring Muḥammad when he referred to the Qur'ānic expression:

> Who will lend God a good loan.

While in the Old Testament, he cites:

> Men are advised to 'lend unto the Lord'.[191]

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190 Ibid.,p. 228.

191 Ibid., p. 231.
See also The Holy Bible, Proverbs 19:17
and the Holy Qur'ān, Sūrah al-Baqarah: 245 (2:245);
Sūrah al-Ḥadīd: 11, 18 (57:11, 18);
Sūrah al-Taghābun: 17 (64:17);
Sūrah al-Muzzammil: 20 (73:20).

Furthermore, the scholar writes:

> The Jews .... professed disgust at a prophet whose concern was his harem - though their studies in the Old Testament should have shown them that this was not incongruous.[192]

The reader is not left in doubt that the brief shift of emphasis is just to prepare him for more scathing criticism of Muḥammad especially in his relationship with the Jews. He suggests a reason for the 'hostility' Muḥammad had against the Jews. He writes:

> ... doubtless the prophet's ultimate determination to destroy the Jews was due to his secret knowledge of matters on which he claimed authority.[193]

Unfortunately we are not informed of the kind of secrets the Prophet had upon which he wanted the Jews exterminated. There is no justification to reason that the Prophet had problems with the Jews because of his personal glories. Possibly, the only room to think like this would be because of the Qur'ānic critique of what it sees as attempts at distorting the earlier revealed scriptures.

He turns the discussion onto the arrival of the Muhājirūn at Yathrib and focuses attention on the difficulties the sudden bloating of the population brought onto the logistics of the city. He then rationalises the 'envy' of the Muslims directed against the Jews who were relatively living in opulence. The poor man then had to look for the easiest way out and hence Muḥammad is again characterised as the leader of brigands seeking to level up the standard of living.[194]

With regard to some of the changes which were introduced by the Prophet especially in the case of the change of *qiblah* from Jerusalem to the Ka'ba, Margoliouth sees this as a clear

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192 Margoliouth, Mohammed, p. 232.
193 Ibid., p. 233.
194 See Ibid., p. 238.

evidence yet that Muḥammad was bent on destroying the Jews. He even claims that the Jews offered to acknowledge the Prophet's mission if he were to revert to Jerusalem as his *qiblah*.[195] The writer then criticises the Jews that instead of using the opportune time of the severance of relations to finish off Muḥammad, because of some phobia, they had to make that offer which Muḥammad resolutely refused. In his own words, he writes:

> Had the Jews not been afraid of him, they would never have made it; had they any plan, any resolution, any courage, they would have utilized this period of failure and ignominy to crush him.[196]

The tone of the statement alone is suggestive of where Margoliouth's sympathies lie.

He spends a considerable amount of space cataloguing policies of Muḥammad which he thinks carry anti-Jewish bias and makes a deduction that these were the causes of the clashes with the Jews.[197]

The ninth chapter of the main book under critique carries the title 'The Destruction of the Jews' and this is indicative of its contents. He takes the cases of the three Jewish tribes one by one and analyses them.

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195 Ibid., p. 249.
It is the belief of Muslims that the Qur'ān makes it clear that the changing of the *qiblah* was not according to Muḥammad's own personal whims but a directive from God.
See: Sūrah al-Baqarah: 142-145, 149-150 (Q. 2: 142-145, 149-150).
One scholar comments on this thus: "The Qur'ān has dealt with this problem beautifully saying that the ceremonial and ritualistic aspects of religion, if at all necessary, have secondary importance; they are not the essentials of faith. Directions of space have little meaning intrinsically in spiritual communion with a Being whose Light, according to the Qur'ān is 'neither Eastern nor Western' (XXIV:35)". 'Abdul Ḥakīm Khalīfah, The Prophet and His Message, (Lahore: Insitute of Islamic Culture, 1972), p. 110.

196 Moḥammed, p. 249.

197 See Ibid., pp. 247-251.

He begins with the story of Muslim preachers sent to the tribes of 'Adal and Karah who were murdered by tribesmen even though the Muslims were sent at their own request. The scholar remarks that:

> With the followers of a sect who, as has been seen, practised treachery whenever it was deemed advisable, we cannot sympathise when they suffer from a similar crime...[198]

Here, Margoliouth become satisfied and judges as appropriate when the suffering is being endured by Muḥammad and his people. If it had been the other way round, he would have immediately described it as barbarity and treachery. We detect lack of consistency in the application of his own principle.

The scholar then catalogues a series of assassinations which he claims were carried out on the orders of Muḥammad.

The events leading to the expulsion of the Banū Naḍīr is discussed next and disputes the recorded version of the story that the Naḍīr plotted to murder Muḥammad. He asserts that it was a figment of the Prophet's own imagination since he was always having the delusion that the Jews wanted to kill him.[199] When the expulsion order was passed, ʿAbdullāh Ibn Ubayy advised them to resist but their own fellow Jewish tribesmen - the Banū Qurayẓah - refused to offer any help in their resistance. Margoliouth refers to this refusal and says:

> This act of cowardice prepares us to feel less sympathy with them for the fate that afterwards befell them.[200]

We reiterate here that if 'killing' or 'barbarous' acts were in themselves wrong as a principle then Margoliouth should have followed through and sympathise or at least understand the Banū

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198 Ibid., p. 310.
199 See Ibid., p. 314.
200 Ibid., pp. 314-315.

Qurayẓah's refusal. However, as one suspects, due to his own bias against Muḥammad and his people, for the Banū Qurayẓah to refuse their brethren help in fighting the Muslims has become an offence and hence the withdrawal of his sympathy.

The line of thinking of Margoliouth is also clear in the way he sometimes punctuates his statements with doubtful remarks. There is a long list of this used over the pages where the Jewish question is under discussion. The following are some of the examples:

> We know not with what truth...

The story is full of:

> Mythical embellishment... we know not, having no Jewish account of the matter.. if the number be correctly given.. The accounts given (by his antecedents) are so fabulous that we cannot quote them here.[201]

These expressions are used only when the situation favours the Muslims. When the circumstances are in favour of the Jews, he does not demand to see a Muslim account of it and he does not reason out at least for argument's sake, the possibility of the Muslim's fabricating stories to excite sympathy.

The scholar, on the authority of al-Wāqidī agrees that representatives of the Jews had signed a secret treaty with the Quraish to thwart the efforts of Muḥammad in every possible way and this led to the Siege of Makkah.[202]

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201 See Ibid., pp. 312-325 and passim.
202 Ibid., p. 323.

The story of the Banū Qurayẓah and their final fate is told in great detail looking at the alternatives open to Muḥammad. He concludes that:

> their fate, horrible as it was, does not surprise us. If they had not succeeded in harming him, they had manifested the will to do so.[203]

He then cautions the reader to assess the verdict on the Qurayzah with that age of Arabia. There is some fairness here, but sadly, this is not widely used in the work. Muḥammad, and indeed the Muslims, are always judged according to late nineteenth century Western liberal Christian principles and with a Jewish bias.

Margoliouth returns to his normal line of discussion accusing Muḥammad of harbouring a theoretical love for the Jews and exhibiting a practical hatred for them. he is of the opinion that the Prophet was 'jealous' of the position of the Jews as 'the chosen people of God' and therefore prayed for their recognition. He became bitter when the recognition did not materialize. He writes:

> The change from a basis of reason to a basis of force had taken place gradually, but now was finally achieved.[204]

He mentions the death of one Sallām Ibn Abū Hukaik supposed to be one of the organisers of the plot against the Muslims. He claims that

> .... five cut-throats went with the prophet's blessing to murder him in his bed.[205]

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203 Ibid., pp. 333-334.
204 Ibid., p. 325.
205 Ibid., p. 336.

He pictures Muḥammad as not being satisfied after 'the mass slaughter' and still chasing one man to his bed to murder him. Referring to opinions that the Muslims were helped by Divine intervention at the siege, he remarks that:

> Whether Moḥammed, who resorted so readily to the aid of the assassin's dagger, believed in these supernatural allies, we know not.[206]

He could have at least assumed that Muḥammad would believe that they were helped by angels. This claim is not new. Since the Battle of Badr, there has been these bold assertions that the Muslims were always not alone in their struggle. The scholar, by making this remark, seems to say that Muḥammad's mission was such a fake that he could not have even believed that Divine help was available to him.

In a rather contentious assertion, the scholar writes that:

> Each time the prophet had failed, or scored an incomplete success, he compensated for it by an attack on the Jews,....[207]

He deduces that Khaibar was taken because of the event at al-Hudaibiyyah. We cannot explain how Margoliouth sees the Hudaibiyyah treaty as a failure for Muḥammad. All the major discussions of the Hudaibiyyah treaty conclude that it was a major diplomatic coup which ended in manifest successes for the Prophet and his followers.[208]

Touching on the letter the Prophet sent to Emperor Heraclius, Margoliouth describes Muḥammad as one whose name strikes panic among people and hence even the emperor was terrified. He claims that if it were not for the fear of reactions from his people, he would have accepted Islam. Assuming that his version of the story is true, the scholar explains that it was

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206 Ibid.
207 Ibid., p. 355.
208 See infra, Section 3.3.14 for a discussion on the Hudaybiyyah Treaty.

not strange because Heraclius himself had massacred Jews before. Hence, he continues, when the emperor heard:

> ... of a prophet in Arabia who had slaughtered six hundred Jews in one day; who, having ruined their settlements at Medinah, had just brought desolation on their greatest and most flourishing colony, killing the men and making the women concubines...[209]

he might have thought of him as a good ally. He sees Muqauqis, who treated the Prophet's letter with respect, in the same light asserting that Muqauqis might have given such favourable response because Muḥammad, the emperor was told, had exterminated a large number of Jews.[210]

3.3.13 THE CHRISTIANS.

The Christians do not receive as much space and concern as the Jews especially in his main work on Muḥammad. However, as a Christian himself he often uses the yardstick of that faith in his assessment of the Prophet. This is perhaps because of two main reasons. Firstly, we believe because of his Jewish background he spares more time for the Jews than the Christians. We might believe that events of history show that Jewish consciousness lingers on no matter whether the person continues to remain in Judaism or not. Secondly, we presume, the confrontations between the Prophet and the Jews far overshadow those with Christians and therefore there is not enough 'ammunition' here to fight the Prophet.

The main discussions centre around alleged incorporation of Christian ideas into the Qur'ān. He opens the deliberations by claiming that despite the massive 'theological or scriptural plagiarism', the cardinal doctrine of Christianity - the Divinity of Jesus - came under

209 Margoliouth, Mohammed, p. 367.
210 See p. 369.

heavy criticism in the discourse of the Prophet. He then claims that the doctrine became the sticking point in Muḥammad's relationship with Christians and hence offered an excuse in which they

> ... might with impunity be plundered.[211]

Margoliouth however, fails to consider why Muḥammad 'borrowed' so much from Christianity but left out the most important. Is it that the man was so bent on destroying them as well that he had to have an excuse? The historicity of this is difficult to rationalise but his is how the scholar's statements appear to suggest. Except where he had to take steps to protect or defend the fragile faith, and of course his person, we do not possess evidence where Muḥammad wilfully, without any cogent rationale, set out to destroy Christians or other tribes. He did not do that even with the people (the Quraish) who are usually described as heathen. Yet, Margoliouth keeps on indicting the Prophet as being

> ... bent on oppressing or exterminating.[212]

Jews and Christians.

He takes up the visit of the Christian delegation from Najrān to the Prophet. In the deliberations on the nature of Christ they had with the Prophet, Margoliouth derides the Prophet's statements claiming that he merely recollected the speech of Jaʿfar Ibn Abū Ṭālib at the court of al-Najāshī. He then says the Prophet highlighted those details that he knew the Christians would dislike.[213]

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211 Ibid., p. 364.
212 Ibid., p. 431.
213 See Ibid., p. 434.

He refers to the challenge of imprecation which the sources say, the Christians declined. Margoliouth doubts the veracity of the details of the story. He argues that the Christians refused to take up the challenge because, knowing how 'violent' the Prophet was, he

> .... would merely have to send some legions to Najrān with orders to destroy the persons on whom destruction had been invoked, and the truth of his doctrine would be demonstrated.[214]

This is again to cast a heavy shadow of doubt on Muḥammad's prophethood because the argument here is that he could fake an attack on the Christians to justify his status. Margoliouth does not discuss how the Christians were treated and does not mention that the Prophet even allowed them to have their service in the mosque.

Again, he does not explain why Muḥammad had not attacked the Christians at al-Najrān long before they sent a delegation to Madīnah if he were that aggressive and had vowed to destroy the Christians and Jews as he is being portrayed to be.[215]

In his article on 'Is Islam a Christian Heresy?' in reaction to an earlier one by F. H. Foster, Margoliouth's main thesis is that Muḥammad's teachings were so devoid of the principal doctrines of Christianity that it could not even be considered.[216]

In that sermon at St. Aldate's Church, Margoliouth accuses Muslims of trying to shape the Prophet's life to agree with that of Jesus. He writes:

> ...If the founder of Christianity provides a model for imitation, the founder of Islam must perforce do as much; hence it has to be shown that his life was the most perfect ever lived.[217]

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214 Ibid., p. 435.

215 For further reading on the delegation's visit see:
Guillaume's translationof Ibn Ishaq, Sīrat Rasūl Allāh, pp. 270-277.
Shibli Nu'mani, Sīrat al-Nabī, p. 369.
Fārūqī's translation of Haykal, The Life of Muḥammad, pp. 195-196, 478.

216 See 'Is Islam a Christian Heresy', passim.

217 Ibid., p. 244.

In a rather scathing attack, he speaks to his colleagues of the church in a language which depicts what one might rightly describe as deep hatred for the Prophet. He says:

> The social and domestic evils which the very name of Islam calls up cannot be rebuked or deplored without reflecting on the prophet's career, and without openly contradicting the so-called Word of God and the consensus of the most authorised teachers. Sin loses much of its venom if it be acknowledged to be sin, if it be open defiance of God's law; but when it claims to be what God has enjoined, and millions believe it, then, indeed, Satan has triumphed.[218]

Here Margoliouth sounds more like the son of a Christian minister and a Christian professor of a Christian University establishment more than an academic. Nevertheless, we refer to it because it helps us have a better opinion about his perception of Muḥammad and his ministry.

3.3.14 THE HUDAIBIYYAH TREATY.

It has to be admitted that Margoliouth perhaps gives more extensive coverage to the above theme than most of his contemporaries. However, one might argue that he does so for the wrong reasons. He is of the opinion that the trip to Makkah in ca. 627 AD (ca. 6 AH) was a mere pretext. His reason is that Muḥammad actually wanted to take Makkah and that is why he:

> ... approached it by a circuitous route, known to few, ...[219]

and arrived at al-Hudaibiyyah where he was confronted by the Makkan army.

This is a rather untenable reason because all available sources explain the mood in which the Prophet and his followers arrived at al-Hudaybiyyah. The Prophet had already ordered them not to be armed but carry the normal sword which every Arab man used to carry

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218 Ibid.
219 Ibid., p. 345.

as part of the requirements for a journey. They also had animals meant for sacrifice. Furthermore, the Prophet was in the garb meant for such occasions.

As for the diversion from the normal route, it was meant to avoid the army of Khālid b. Walīd who had been sent as an advance party by the Makkans to halt the Prophet's march.[220] Margoliouth continues that:

> If however, the idea of storming Meccah had to be given up, the pretence of the pilgrimage still remained; and also he was not unwilling to impress the Meccans with a sense of his might, wealth, and the reverence and awe which he inspired.[221]

He, however, does not explain why he refused to show his awe-inspiring personality in order to instil more fear into the people who are now at his mercy?

He further goes on with the details of the agreement signed with the Makkans and writes that:

> He certainly submitted to humiliation, since though his followers slaughtered their camels, and shaved their heads, they could only by straining words be said to have entered the sacred precincts safely.[222]

He explains rather correctly that some of the Muslims (especially 'Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb) considered the event such a discomfiture that they showed their displeasure openly. He however adds by conjecture that Muḥammad, knowing these personalities rather too well, used the expected raid on Khaibar as an allurement to keep them in check.[223]

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220 For further reading on the Ḥudaybiyah Treaty see:
Shiblī Nu'mānī, Sīrat al-Nabi, pp. 390-400;
Guillaume's Translation of Ibn Ishaq, Sīrat Rasūl Allāh, pp. 499-507;
Fārūqī's Translation of Haykal, The Life of Muhammad, pp. 340-359;
Abūl Ḥasan 'Alī Nadwī, Muḥammad Rasūlullāh, pp. 261-272.

221 Margoliouth, Mohammed, p. 345.

222 Ibid., p. 348.

223 Ibid., p. 349.
See also, p. 355 and supra, Section 3.12.

The scholar recognizes that the Makkans had an edge over the Muslims as far as the terms of the agreement on the whole were concerned. It is true that despite the compromises the Prophet had to make, the clause regarding extradition of renegades weighed heavily in favour of the Quraish. He acknowledges the fact that the Prophet stood by the treaty and returned to the Quraish some of the Makkans who wanted to go to Madīna.

However, he refuses comment on the implications of this as far as the Prophet's character is concerned. The powerful 'bloodletting tyrant', 'the robber chief', the man whose moral senses do not waver when he is ordering the murder of innocent civilians, is accepting such a 'humiliating treatment'.[224] We presume that the matter was left at that because a deeper reflection on it would have turned the basic thesis of the writer on its head. Scholars have analysed this 'humiliating treaty' and have indeed recognized the immense prudence of the Prophet. While his companions were more concerned with what they saw as an immediate opportunity in this particular instance, Muḥammad was more concerned with the future, and perceived that the end results bore good news. Indeed, this was confirmed by Divine intimation.[225]

Ibn Khaldūn, writes:

> And there was never a victory... greater than this victory; for, as Az-Zuhrī says, when it was war the people did not meet, but when the truce came and war laid down its burdens and people felt safe one with another, then they met and indulged in conversation and discussion. And no man spoke of Al-Islam to another but the latter espoused it, so that these entered Al-Islam in those two years (ie. between Al-Hudeybiyyah and the breaking of the truce by the Qureysh) as many as all those who had entered it before, or more.[226]

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224 Vide supra, Section 3.19.

225 See: Sūrah al-Fath:1 (Q. 48:1) and passim..

226 Cited by Muḥammad M. Pickthall, in his translation of the Qur'ān, The Glorious Qur'ān (Makkah: Muslim World League, 1977), p. 557.
He remarks that Ibn Khaldūn's statement agrees with that of Ibn Hishām on the subject.

Haykal also affirms the true nature of the treaty. He points out that:

> There was.. no reason to doubt that the Hudaybiyah Treaty was a victory for the Muslims. History has shown that this pact was the product of profound political wisdom and far-sightedness and that it brought about consequences of great advantage to Islam and indeed to Arabia as a whole.[227]

3.3.15 MUḤAMMAD'S LETTERS.

Margoliouth takes a look at the letters of the Prophet sent to various world leaders of the day. He considers these invitations to be a proclamation of the programme of world conquest.[228] How Margoliouth comes to consider the letters as a sign of Muḥammad's imperial intent is difficult to fathom. The tone of the letters themselves (a subject we shall return to presently) does not suggest any desire to colonize the world.

It needs to be pointed out that the sending of letters was one of the magnificent sequels to the Hudaibiyyah Treaty which Margoliouth considered as a humiliation. Islam, by its very nature, is meant to be offered to all people and hence the Prophet was bound, by the nature of his mission, to call on (invite) these elites of the society to it.[229]

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227 Fārūqī's Translation of Haykal, The Life of Muhammad, p. 355.
See also, p. 356.
Shiblī Nūmānī reiterates the same view thus:
"The Treaty of Hudaybiyah has been a victory by Allah; it was not a victory of bodies but of hearts. Islam wanted peace for its propagation and this was secured through the treaty".
See: Sīrat un-Nabī, vol. II, p. 409.

228 Margoliouth, Mohammed, p. 364.

229 See T.W. Arnold, The Preaching of Islam, especially chapter 1 on the missionary nature of Islam.
See also:
Sūrah Al-Baqarah:143 (Q.2:143);
al-'Imrān: 104, 110, 187 (Q.3:104, 110, 187);
al-A'nām: 48 (Q.6:48);
Ibrāhim: 4-6 (Q.14: 4-6);
an-Nahl: 125 (Q. 16:125);
al-Ahzāb: 45-47 (Q. 33:45-477)
All these passages make the duty of the Prophet and indeed his followers clear. They have to spread the Word of God so that humankind would do what is right and forbid what is wrong (Q.2:104,110).

Starting with the letter sent to the Muqauqis, supposedly the Coptic Patriarch and the Governor of Egypt, the scholar publishes a photograph of the original text and translates it without comment.[230]

The next to be mentioned is that sent to Heraclius the Caesar who, Margoliouth suggests, treated the letter with some respect because he was pleased the Prophet had massacred Jews.[231] In connection with this, Margoliouth doubts the details that Abū Sufyān was summoned by the emperor to explain the circumstances of his kinsman Muḥammad claiming prophethood. Even though he admits that it is possible for Abū Sufyān to have been around Syria to be called to the presence of the emperor, he is of the opinion that knowing the problems the Quraish had had with Muḥammad, he would have sought the help of the king to destroy Muḥammad and Islam.

We would like to submit that even though the thinking of Margoliouth is quite valid, and we are told by the scholar himself that Abū Sufyān more or less tried to bring down Muhammad, we must take into consideration the period we are dealing with.[232] This is around 627-628 AD and by this time Muḥammad had achieved a commendable stability which, Abū Sufyān knew very well, would have been almost impossible to change.

The Chosroes (Khusro Parvez) of Persia is next on the list and he treated the letter of the Prophet with contempt. He died not long after this incident. Margoliouth does not accept the version of the narrative that when the Prophet was informed of how he treated his letter, he prophesied the death of the king. He suggests that the Prophet had a well-oiled intelligence network implying that he might have heard of the death before making the statement.[233]

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230 Margoliouth, Mohammed, see the page facing p.364 for the 'original text' and p.365 for the translation.
231 See, pp. 365-367 and supra, Section 3.3.12
232 See Ibid.
233 Ibid., p. 368.

However, he does not explain the time lapse between the delivery of the letter and the period the emissaries who were supposed to arrest the Prophet, reached Madīnah. We read that the Prophet's prediction of the destruction of Chosroes and his kingdom was soon after a report reached him about the contemptuous way his letter was treated. The emperor himself sent a note to Badhan, the Governor of Yemen, who in turn sent the messengers to Madīnah to arrest Muḥammad. Taking into account the conditions in those days, it probably took at least some weeks before the messengers of Badhan reached Madīnah. Therefore, the opinion of Margoliouth that Muḥammad must have got wind of Chosroes' death before making the curses, is not tenable under such circumstances.[234]

What surprises the reader is the scholar's failure to discuss the nature of the letters and what they tell us about the nature of the Prophet.

The standard format is very clear, that the Prophet was only inviting (calling) the people into Islam in accordance with the Divine dictates.[235] Nothing in any of the letters offers us room to speculate the Prophet was interested in world dominion.

A closer look at the general pattern of the letters produces something like the following:

1. Introduction - Praises to Allah; indicating the origin of the letter and its addressee.
2. Greetings to the addressee.
3. Invitation to Islam, indicating that it is for the addressee's own good. Sometimes, followed by a short theological statement especially on Jesus and Mary.

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234 See:
S. Aḥmed Qureshi: Letters of the Holy Prophet, Karachi, International Islamic Publishers, 1983, passim;
Guillaume's Translation of Ibn Isḥāq, Sīrat Rasūl Allāh, pp. 653-659;
Fārūqī's Translation of Haykal, The Life of Muhammad, pp. 374-379;
Abūl Ḥasan ʿAlī Nadwī, Muhammad Rasūlullāh, Chapt. 15;
Shiblī Nuʿmānī, Sīrat al-Nabī, pp. 401-409;
Afzal Iqbāl, Diplomacy in Early Islam, passim.

235 See supra, note 227.

4. The consequences of rejecting the invitation - the responsibility the ruler owes to his people and the fact that in the hereafter he would be answerable to God for all the sins of his subjects.

5. Conclusion- the recipient to bear witness that he (the Prophet) has done his duty by inviting him.[236]

3.3.16 GENERAL PERSONALITY.

Under this theme we would like to acknowledge the rather positive remarks of Margoliouth in respect of the personality of the Prophet. However, we need to point out that the comments are greatly overshadowed by the bulk of material, which could probably be described as designed to destroy Muḥammad. Nevertheless, fairness and indeed requirements of basic academic scholarship would not permit us to ignore these comments.

He recognizes the affectionate disposition of Muḥammad and shows how he demonstrated this openly in his own family life. This is also reflected in the way he treated his attendant, and later adopted son, Zaid. His general behaviour towards children, Margoliouth agrees, is quite commendable.[237]

Referring to *aḥādīth* sources, the scholar discusses the deprivations that sometimes the Prophet and his family had to undergo. He writes:

> It must be admitted that the prophet shared the full misery of his followers: and indeed as he refused to employ the Alms for his private needs, he had no source of revenue.[238]

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236 See the suggested references in supra, note 232, especially the works of Sultan Qureshi, Afzal Iqbāl and Abūl Hasan ʿAlī Nadwī.

237 Margoliouth, Mohammed, pp. 70-71.

238 Ibid., p. 236.

Continuing the discussion further, he says:

> Hence, when casual and private generosity failed, he was content to starve.[239]

He touches on those homeless companions who used to hang around the Prophet's mosque and confirms that:

> When presents of food were sent to the Prophet, he would share it with (them).[240]

These companions, dubbed 'Ahl al-Ṣuffah' (People of the shed, bench), were too poor and helpless to make ends meet and did not even have accommodation. By making this comment, Margoliouth puts some refreshing moments into the reader's labour to understand Muḥammad.

He gives a piquant description to the events at the battle of Hunain and accepts the sincerity and integrity of the Muslim historians.[241]

Again, he is able to acknowledge the honesty of Muḥammad when he cites the case where the Prophet had to borrow some money from ʿAbdallāh Ibn Abī Rabīah. He points out to the reader that this loan was:

> ... honesty repaid.[242]

Despite the fact that he had suggested earlier that the Prophet imposed taxes on the Jews to exact wealth from them to replenish the state treasury, he now agrees as to the object of the *jizyah*. He points out that the alms were to be used in charity to look after the poor and not for the Prophet's own private use. The *jizyah*, he affirms, was payment for services rendered, these

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239 Ibid.
240 Ibid.
241 Ibid., p. 397.
242 Ibid.

largely involving protection.[243] He more or less accepts the moral probity of Muḥammad by stating that the Prophet was above material aggrandisement and hence he did not make use of the proceeds from the collections.[244] He also depicts Muḥammad as a fair and firm administrator. Margoliouth points out that when requests came from his kith and kin for special favours, Muḥammad:

> ... did not readily grant such request, and appears in no case to have injured his administration by nepotism; nor did he allow his relatives to interfere with the course of justice.[245]

The scholar makes a remark on ʿĀishah, the one he maligned so much in his earlier pages.[246] He writes:

> ... from the time of her emergence from childhood till her death at the age of sixty-six, she exhibited a degree of ability and unscrupulousness which should earn her a place beside Agrippinas and Elizabeths of history.[247]

Margoliouth increasingly turns to a softer language stating that with Muḥammad:

> The occasions... on which he had to punish were exceedingly rare...[248]

Curiously, he accepts that:

> The recognition of his prophetic claim was to the end a sort of incense whose perfume never staled.[249]

He touches on the Prophet's generosity to all creatures and mentions the incident where the Prophet ordered to extinguish a fire they had been set into an anthill.[250]

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243 See Ibid., pp. 440-441.
244 Ibid., p. 443.
245 Ibid., p. 453.
246 See Ibid., pp. 14, 61, 234-235, 321 and 342.
247 Ibid., p. 450.
248 Ibid., p. 456.
249 Ibid.

Discussing some of the teachings of the Prophet, the scholar commends the immense positive changes introduced into that decadent society. He virtually sings the praises of Muḥammad on his teachings on banning infanticide and superstitious beliefs, admitting that whatever be the case, Islam won a large amount of liberty for women.[251]

On the treatment of slaves, the scholar presents the true opinion that:

> .... manumission was also declared by him to be an act of piety, and many an offence might be expiated by the setting free of a neck.[252]

Margoliouth's article in the Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics on Muḥammad also offers a slightly different attitude even though, as said before, compared with the bulk of the article, they pale into insignificance. For example, on the moral reforms brought by Muḥammad, he says:

> With the institution of private property and the acquisition of wealth he found no fault, and he deprecated extravagance in almsgiving as in other matters. The quality of personal courage he rated very high, and, though he often inspired it by the promise of paradise, it is clear that his followers were largely persons who required no such stimulus to make them brave.[253]

What do we make of such an apparent turn around or contradiction? These opinions perhaps find meaning in the argument that probably Margoliouth sees Muḥammad as having 'matured'. This reasoning is made on the point that many of such 'sober' remarks cover the latter part of the Prophet's life.

It is also logical for one to presume that maybe Margoliouth, being a European, is trying to plead to be seen as playing fair. We are of the opinion that he recognizes that his whole

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250 Ibid., p. 458.
251 Ibid., pp. 458-461.
252 Ibid., p. 462.
253 ERE, p. 876.

credibility is at stake and therefore he needs to tone down his vitriolic assessment of Muḥammad.

3.3.17 MUḤAMMAD - JOSEPH SMITH PARALLELISM.

Gibb, in his Mohammedanism, discusses the frantic attempts by Western scholars to somehow unravel the 'mystery' surrounding Islam and 'fill in the gaps' that they consider exist. He then states:

> Consequently, there are almost as many theories about Mohammed as there are biographies. He has, for example, been portrayed as an epileptic, as a social agitator, as a proto-Mormon. All such EXTREME SUBJECTIVE views are generally repudiated by the main body of scholars, yet it remains almost impossible to avoid importing some subjective element into any account of his life and work.[254]

It is with this comment in view that we examine Margoliouth's use of such theory. He sees Muhammad as a sort of Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism (The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints). He compares Muhammad's regular visits to the Cave of Hira in the practice of *Taḥannuth* and Joseph Smith's wanderings in the forest and deduces that both claimed angelic visitations.[255]

Again, he likens Smith's claim to the access he had to some hidden tablets written in a:

> ... language which he only could translate 'by the Grace of God'.[256]

to the Qur'ānic revelations from the 'Preserved Tablet'.[257]

The assertions being made here are very strange. The wanderings of Smith in the woodlands do not compare with the established, well-ordered practice of the society in Arabia

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254 H.A.R. Gibb, Mohammedanism, (London etc.: Oxford University Press, 1949), p. 23, [emphasis ours].
255 Margoliouth, Mohammed, p. 90.
256 Ibid., p. 91.
257 The 'Lawḥ Maḥfūẓ' See: Surah al-Buruj: 22 (Q. 85: 22).

at the time. Further, Muḥammad never claimed that he was reading from a special Sacred Tablet, the script of which he alone could read, understand and interpret. The language of the revelation was in Arabic as he received it and hence there were no secrets. In actual fact, the Qur'ān says it was revealed in Arabic so that its first recipients would have no problem relating to it.[258] It is therefore surprising that Muḥammad could be seen as a sort of 'precursor' for Joseph Smith at least on this account.

Margoliouth alleges that Muḥammad claimed he was:

> .. permitted only occasionally to access to the guarded tablet[259]

and remarks that this reasoning is better than that of Joseph Smith where he reads directly and, by implication, constantly from his tablet. One becomes confounded as to where the scholar got his information from . Muḥammad has not been said by any of the known sources as having claimed a periodic glimpse of the Lawḥ Maḥfūẓ to read from. He is always said to have 'received' and 'heard' from a tablet and 'receiving' or 'hearing' a message either directly or indirectly belong to two different categories which are rarely comparable.[260]

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258 See:
Sūrah Yūsuf: 2 (Q. 12:2);
al-Fusilat: 44 (Q. 41:44);
ash-Shūra: 7 (Q. 42:7).

259 Margoliouth, Mohammed, p.91.

260 For further reading on the subject of Revelation in Islam, See:
- Guillaume's Translation of Ibn Isḥāq, Sīrat Rasūl Allāh, esp. Part III on 'Muḥammad's Call and Preaching in Meccah.
- Muhammad Rashīd Riḍā: The Revelation to Muḥammad, translated from the Arabic by Abdus-Samad Sharāfuddīn, Part 1 2nd Revised Edition, (Bhiwandi (India) Ad-Darūl-Qayyimah, 1960), esp. Chpt. 1 on 'Divine Message and Messengers' and passim.
- Abūl Hasan ʿAlī Nadwī: Islamic Concept of Prophethood, (Lucknow (India): Academy of Islamic Research and Publications, 1979), passim.
- Fazlur Rahmān: Islam 2nd. Ed., (Minneapolis and Chicago: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1979), esp. Chpt. 1 on 'Muḥammad and the Revelation'.

The Qur'ānic challenge issued to the disbelievers to produce a surah like that found in the revealed word[261] is likened to an alleged attempt by one William E. McLellin, a follower of Joseph Smith, who failed in his attempt to write a piece of work like the Mormon scripture.[262]

Even the Hijrah of the Prophet is also seen to be replicated by Joseph Smith when the Mormons moved from New York to Ohio and from there to Missouri and finally settled at Utah. The scholar says that the Muslim situation is similar to that of the Mormons who:

> ... vexed and persecuted, fled to a new land and started a now thriving colony.[263]

This methodology of Margoliouth has been described by Snouck Hurgronje as a polemical tactic called 'Crypto-Mohamedanism'. Hurgronje has argued that the Roman Catholic Church used to vilify the Protestants by comparing their doctrines to those of Islam.[264]

The theory was further developed by one Rev. E.D. Howe who in his The History of Mormonism used it against the Mormons. He described Joseph Smith as an ignorant prophet and a disciple of:

> ... the great prince of deceivers, Muhammed.[265]

The theory was largely seen to be in vogue in the United States of America in the early nineteenth century until 1861 when Richard Burton allegedly shifted the theory from its cradle to Europe.[266] He is thus described as the first agent of this transplant. Arnold H. Green

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261 See Sūrah al-Baqarah: 23-24 (Q.2:23-24);
Yūnus: 38 (Q. 10:38).

262 Cited in Margoliouth, Mohammed, p. 134.

263 Ibid., p. 156.

264 See Christian Snouck Hurgronje: Mohammedanism: Lectures on Its Origin, Its Religious and Political Growth, and Its Present State., (New York: Putnam's, 1916), p. 18.

265 Published in New York, Painsville, 1834, p. 12.

266 See his: The City of the Saints across the Rocky Mountains to California, 1861 reprinted by Fawn M. Brodie, (New York: Knopf), 1963.

assumes that:

> It was perhaps via Burton that the comparison came to the attention of a less adventurist, more bookish Orientalist: D.S. Margoliouth of the University of London.[267]

Margoliouth, the eminent scholar as he was, should have known the superficial nature of such an argument with ulterior motives which do not augur well for serious academic work.

One might, on the other hand, throw in a line of defence that he (Margoliouth) could have been trying to show his grasp of the phenomenology of religion, at the time a new field of study.

3.3.18 CONCLUSION.

From the foregoing one can safely conclude by looking at Margoliouth's own stated aims in the book and what he has been able to achieve so far. He seems to go along with the perception that greater the antiquity of a material, the more likelihood of reliability.[268]

He is able, somehow, to give a human account of Muḥammad with reference to Ibn Isḥāq. He sees him as a great figure of history no doubt. However, as a Christian, he uses his Christian lens to examine the Prophet and hence doubts the genuineness of his Prophethood. Perhaps his position is not very different from that of Thomas Carlyle who saw the Prophet only as a hero just that his (Margoliouth's) is presented from a Christian premise.[269]

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267 A.H. Green: 'The Muhammad - Joseph Smith Comparison: Subjective Metaphore, or a Sociology of Prophethood' in Spencer J. Palmer: Mormons and Muslims - Spiritual Foundations and Modern Manifestations, Conference Papers, (Utah: Bringham Young University, 1985), p. 67.

268 vide supra, Sect. 3.2.1.

269 Thomas Carlyle: On Heroes, hero-worship and heroic in History, (London, 1891).

Probably, one might have to understand that the Oxford ethos demanded a particular style and being a highly respected professor of that eminent place, Margoliouth was more or less playing in accordance with the rules of the game.

Again, we need to acknowledge that Margoliouth's style is fundamentally different from Muir perhaps because of the position the latter found himself in. Muir was an Imperial officer trained for Imperial work which, perhaps, due to the authority of that office, enabled him to be more blunt.

Even though one acknowledges the fact that Margoliouth uses more sources than Muir, he still approaches these sources with a mind wedded to the polemical tradition. The use of Muslim sources *per se* does not guarantee a shift of attitude form the bias mode. We see this unfortunately, in Margoliouth as the pages indicate. We submit that he has failed to function critically in a disciplined way. Here, we are not questioning his use of sources but the interpretation.

The rather confessional posture he has displayed in some of his remarks especially in the book itself, the article in the Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics and the sermon he gave at the St. Aldate's Church, Oxford, has impact on his ability as a scholar. His prejudicial treatment is often seen in his imaginative reconstruction of events when his sources do not provide adequate information. Quite often, he makes personal judgements on Muslim beliefs not by force of rationality or academic reflection. For example, he mentions the story in which 'Umar was supposed to have expressed his unhappiness when the Prophet prayed over the body of 'Abdallāh Ibn Ubayy. Shortly after this event a revelation came which banned praying for

unbelievers. Margoliouth then writes:

> To Omar, the coincidence did not apparently suggest the remotest suspicion; to us the revelation appears to have been nothing more than a formal adoption of a suggestion of Omar which the prophet supposed to represent public opinion.[270]

This is an indictment on the whole vocation of Muḥammad as a prophet if he feigns 'his revelations'.

In his characterisation of Muḥammad and his followers as bloodletting people, he makes a comment on the death of ʿAmr Ibn al-Haḍrami saying:

> 'Amr, son of Al-Hadhrami (the man of Hadramaut), was the first of the MILLIONS to be slaughtered in the name of Allah and his prophet.[271]

What kind of conjecture could put the people killed in confrontations with Islam into millions?

In his attempt to understand the reasons for the resounding defeat the Quraish suffered at the hands of the Muslims he supposes, among others, that the Muslims had experience of military drill because of their form of prayer (*ṣalāh*). He also adds that the Makkans did not want to shed the blood of their own kinsmen on the other side of the divide.[272]

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270 Margoliouth, Mohammed, p. 218.

271 Ibid., p. 245, [emphasis ours].
'Amr Ibn al Haḍrami is reputed to be the first person to die at the hands of the Muslims. It was at Nakhlah, when a group led by ʿAbdullah Ibn Jahsh was sent by the Prophet to investigage the movement of the Quraysh caravan and report back, confronted 'Amr and he was killed. The Prophet was displeased at this because he pointed out that he did not send them to go and fight especially since that was month of Rajab, traditionally respected without fighting.
In fact, Shiblī Nu'mānī calls this incident the real cause of the battle of Badr.
See, Sirat-ul-Nabī, pp. 317-320.
For further reading on this subject, see:
- Fārūqī's translation of Haykal, The Life of Muhammad, pp. 208-211;
- Guillaume's translation of Ibn Ishaq, Sīrat Rasūl Allāh, pp. 286-289.

272 See Margoliouth, Ibid., pp. 258-266.

Eliot Howard, in the review of Margoliouth, is perhaps right when, after going through the images of Muḥammad given, remarks:

> This is not a very pleasant picture of a great religious leader; and, without venturing to dispute Professor Margoliouth's scholarship, we may venture to doubt whether the author (sic) of the earlier surahs of the Koran was as coldly selfish at the beginning of his course as he appears to have become under the pressure of circumstances.[273]

In a rather harsh comment from The Comarade, a Muslim paper in Calcutta at the dawn of this century, the opinion sees Margoliouth's work on Muḥammad as:

> ...far more dangerous...

than that of Muir which is openly characterised by its Christian prejudices. The paper goes on:

> Professor Margoliouth has hidden, though not always successfully, a worse Christian bias than Sir William Muir's, and in the praise of the hero has sought to kill the prophet. There is an insidious undercurrent running throughout the book, and the virus is skilfully mixed in every page.[274]

In fact, Margoliouth's visit to the pathological theory more or less displays a bit of medieval heritage. As Norman Daniel has pointed out, this conjecture probably started with Mark of Toledo who described the mood of Muḥammad in his reception of revelation and concluded that it might be an epileptic seizure. Daniel then remarks:

> This account could not more closely or faithfully record the Muslim idea of how Muḥammad received the revelations. The author's intention is likely to have been to provide information, and so to assist Christian Controversialists to prepare polemic which would be based on authentic and Muslim sources.[275]

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273 Mohammed: The Rise of Islam by D.S. Margoliouth (Book Review) in: CMI, Vol. 57, (July 19)06, pp. 545-546.

274 'Professor Margoliouth's 'Life of Moḥammed" in MW Vol. II, No. 3, (July 1912), p. 311.

275 Islam and the West, p. 49.

One would have expected Margoliouth to depend on conclusively proven ideas. In fact, the way Margoliouth uses his sources has been criticised. Shiblī Nu'mānī acknowledges his scholarly aptitude. However, he writes:

> Margoliouth has read every letter of the six huge volumes of Musnad of Imām Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal .... but in the entire history of the world there is not another book containing as much falsehood, accusation, misrepresentation and prejudice as his work on the life of the prophet. If he can claim any success it is that he has by his ingenuity changed the more simple and ordinary events, which have no trace of evil about them into something ugly.[276]

On Margoliouth's claim that the Prophet and his family used to practice idolatry and even named his children after idols, Shiblī Nu'mānī investigates his source and finds that in the *isnād* offered in Bukhārī's Tārīkh al-Ṣaghīr the first figure is Ismā'īl b. Abī Uways who was known not to be that trustworthy. Nu'mānī then emphasises that:

> It has been conclusively proved that the prophet had begun to denounce idolatry even before his call to prophethood, and used to tell those persons in whom he had confidence to abstain from idolatrous practices.[277]

Margoliouth, relying on Noldeke, doubts whether the address given by Ja'far at the Court of al-Najāshī could be accepted as genuine because Abyssinians and Arabs needed interpretation in their conversation.[278] However, Shiblī Nū'mānī emphasises that the Abyssinians could understand Arabic. He points out that the Ethiopian language and Arabic had close affinity. Again, he says, interpreters at the Court of Kings was a normal feature in those days.[279] This

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276 Shiblī Nū'mānī, Sīrat al-Nabī, p. 95.

277 Ibid., p. 180.
See also the footnote in which he criticises Margoliouth's allegation that Muḥammad and Khadījah used to worship the idol al-ʿUzzā before going to bed. On his other claim that the couple sacrificed a brown sheep dedicated to al-ʿUzzā, Shiblī Nū'mānī points out that Kalbī, on whose authority the statement is given, is a notorious liar.

278 See Margoliouth, Mohammed, p. 158. See also the footnote.

279 Shiblī Nu'mānī, Sīrat al-Nabī, p.221, note 3.

then leaves the reader to question why Margoliouth of all people, the polyglot, could have overlooked this simple fact and deny the authenticity of Ja'afar's speech.

Inayatullah, in his analysis of three British Orientalists - Sir Deninson Ross, H.A.R. Gibb and D.S. Margoliouth - also spares no sympathy for Margoliouth. He pays tribute to his acclaimed scholarship but accuses him of abuse of this image. He writes:

> While his erudition is certainly beyond all reproach and the series of his learned works have for several decades shed lustre on British Orientalist scholarship, we feel constrained to observe that his writings on Islam are, unfortunately, marred by a strong bias and have, in consequence, been regarded with distrust in the Muslim East.[280]

Margoliouth's constant comparison of Joseph Smith of the Mormons with Muḥammad, is, as we have indicated, a bad judgement on his part because the whole theory has been known to be a propaganda ploy used by the polemicists in the past centuries.[281] The scholar's usage of the theory could probably be explained from his background. As an ordained minister of the Anglican Church he was perhaps upholding the position among certain Christians that revelation reached its *ne plus ultra* in the advent of Jesus Christ. To such opinion, it is unacceptable to claim any revelation after Christ. Joseph Smith's claim to reception of revelation could therefore be nothing but an imposture. Since there has already been suggestions of certain aspects of Mormonism resembling those of Islam, Margoliouth readily falls for these theories.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that some forced comparison of the historical experiences of both Muḥammad and Smith could be possible, as it could be done with any other claimant to prophethood, the plausibility of this in scholarly work leaves much to be desired.

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280 Sh. Inayatullah, 'Personalia' in I.C. Vol. XII, No. 4, (Oct. 1938), p. 535.

281 Vide supra, Section 3.3.19.

From Margoliouth's own life history, we have learned that he has been a controversialist.[282] In fact, he has lived up to this very characterisation and has provided an account of Muḥammad laced with massive contentious opinions which some readers might conclude have impugned his scholarly aptitude.

The second part of the thesis which follows looks at contemporary twentieth century material where W. Montgomery Watt is selected as the representative.

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282 Vide supra, Section 3.1.

PART II

CHAPTER FOUR.

SURVEY OF TWENTIETH CENTURY LITERATURE

4.1.1 INTRODUCTION.

The appearance of Margoliouth's book opened the floodgates on the English scene for active writing on Muḥammad and his ministry. Without laying any pretentious claims to exhaustiveness, we would like to make a survey of the literature which appeared on the European setting during the period after Margoliouth's book and the 1980's.

As our domain indicates, as defined by the topic we are dealing with, our interest lies mainly in English works published in Europe and especially in Britain. Included in these would also be those translated from other European languages into English and are judged to have made some kind of impact on the intellectual landscape. It is perhaps important to indicate that a little bit more attention would be paid to those that we believe have occupied the centre stage in the English works on Muḥammad in particular.

This survey would enable us to set the proper context for William Montgomery Watt whose works this chapter sets to critique.

4.1.2 THE FIRST HALF OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY.

Leones Caetani's monumental ten volume work started appearing in the same year as Margoliouth's main book on Muḥammad.[1] Rodinson writes that after Caetani's:

> ... massive study on the life of the prophet (and also on the subsequent period)... the researcher could rightly feel a sense of discouragement.[2]

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1 Annali dell 'Islam, (Milano, Ulrich Hoepli), 1905-26.

2 'A Critical Survey of Modern Studies on Muḥammad' in Swartz, Merlin L. (trans.): Studies on Islam, (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 23.

The "sense of discouragement" here is felt in the sense that everything that needed to be said had been said. Rodinson goes further to say that Caetani's work:

... marks both the culmination and the end of a period of scholarly investigation.[3]

Perhaps, Margoliouth might have generated that kind of feeling as well among his admirers who could not fathom the scholar's intellectual capability.

However, the context of the twentieth century especially in view of political developments, made Islam an important theme in the West. People were literally looking for both the origin and the 'originator' of this 'phenomenon' called Islam.[4]

Rodinson makes mention of an interesting poll conducted in France by a Book Club asking its members to choose personalities whose biographies they would like to see published ranking them in order of preference. Muḥammad topped the list with a wide margin.[5]

The nineteenth century historical posture and the critical approach to scholarship fostered the kind of works on Muḥammad in particular and Islam in general in the twentieth century. Nevertheless, as Rodinson points out, a lot of tares are mixed up with the wheat but these are to be excused taking into account the general euphoria generated by the early scholars.

Some of the material could rightly be described as hypercritical and excessive. Rodinson cautions that:

> The accounts found in our Muslim sources of events which occurred at the beginning of Islam do require special methodological study, for the process of oral transmission constitutes a problem whose implications have not yet been fully explored.[6]

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3 Rodinson, 'A Critical Survey', p. 23.
4 See Ibid., p. 23.
5 Ibid., p. 24.
6 Ibid., p. 24.

Not long after Caetani, the publication of J.L. Menezes The Life and Religion of Mohammed, the Prophet of Arabia came up.[7]

The Reverend Canon Edward Sell followed up with his own The Life of Mohammad.[8] Having previously written extensively on Islam, the experienced scholar points out that he dwells on the 'political factor' in the life of the Prophet because he thought that area had been neglected by previous scholars. Among his sources he counts Muir and Margoliouth. He agrees with Muir that the kind of Christianity the Prophet became acquainted with was of the depraved kind hence Muḥammad's image of Christianity as reflected in the Qur'ān. Sell makes mention of what he considers 'historical fact' that at the time of the appearance of the angel Jibraeel to Muḥammad in the cave of Hira, the Prophet's family was with him. He follows other writers like Muir, MacDonald and Margoliouth and believes in the epileptic fits theory.

He portrays Muḥammad as being the culprit who began the whole episode of confrontations with the non-Muslims and shows his sympathy towards the Jews in their confrontations with Muḥammad. He writes on the Banū Qurayẓah issue that Muḥammad's actions:

> .... cannot be justified by comparison with other men. They belong to a different category; they are according to Muslim theology, the result of a divine impulse within him, the deeds of a sinless and therefore perfect man. The form the highest ideal and the most perfect conception of life which Islam can present. All apologies based on the fact that other leaders, religious or secular, have done similar deeds are altogether beside the question.[9]

One wonders what Sell's analysis of the fall of Jericho would be because that was a typical use of Divine power to destroy a whole city.[10]

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7 London: Sands and Company, 1912.

8 London: The Christian Literature Society for India, 1913.

9 Ibid., pp. 173-4.

In his conclusion, as it could be expected of a man of that vocation, Sell states categorically that Muḥammad could not be a prophet. He writes:

> The impartial student of history will come to the conclusion on a careful review of Muhammad's life and work, that, although he was a very successful Arab chief, and did much to maintain and spread a belief in one God, he has entirely failed to establish his position as a divinely commissioned prophet, or to show that he was sent with 'the guidance and the religion of truth that he might exalt it above every religion', and make it set aside all that had gone before. We cannot, therefore, admit that Muhammad was sent from God.....[11]

One important factor to consider here is his great reliance on Muir and Margoliouth as standards.

We might also draw to attention the work of G.M. Draycott which appeared on the market in 1915.[12] Anees and Athar describe this book as

> A biographical study of the prophet with an extremely harsh tone.[13]

In the first three decades after Margoliouth, in 1929, appeared Father Henri Lammens' Islam-Beliefs and Institutions.[14] Even though this work contains only a chapter on Muḥammad, its dominant theme of the Prophet and the institutions of the religion justifies its mention. In fact, Lammens, a Belgian Jesuit priest, wrote extensively on Islam, especially on the Prophet and his family, through a number of books and articles. Rodinson sees him as a scholar who

> ... dominated European studies on Muḥammad during the first third of the century.[15]

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10 See Joshua 5:13 - 6:27.

11 Sell: The Life, pp. 231-2.

12 Mahomet - Founder of Islam, (London: Martin Secker, 1915).

13 Anees, Munawar Aḥmad and Athar, Alia, Guide to Sīra and Ḥadīth Literature in Western Languages, (London & New York: Mansell Publishing Ltd., 1986), Item No. 315, p. 40.

14 Translated from the French by E. Denison Ross, (London: Methuen, 1929).

15 "A Critical Survey", p. 26.

Despite his fine Arabic scholarship, Lammens had his own biases and as a Frenchman denounced the Muslim resistance against the French imperialists. As Rodinson again indicates, Lammens:

> ... was filled with a holy contempt for Islam, for its 'delusive glory' and its works, for its 'dissembling' and 'lascivious' Prophet, for the Arabs of the desert who in his judgement were cowards and swaggerers, plunderers and destroyers.[16]

In his effort to discredit the Prophet and Islam, he went a bit too far in employing methodologies which could hardly withstand academic scrutiny.

The only accounts acceptable to him were those that reflected unfavourably on Muḥammad and his family. His excessive prejudice, his violation of the texts a little too often, and his errors have justly called forth severe judgements.[17]

In fact, the attacks were such that some Christian writers expressed disquiet about the impact of his methodology.

Rodinson makes mention of an instance in which Ignac Goldziher expressed such concern in a private discourse with Louis Massignon. Goldziher is reported to have said:

> What would remain of the Gospels if he applied to them the same methods he applies to the Qur'an?[18]

Some people however see one good benefit from such unrestrained use of extreme criticism. For Rodinson, such approaches

> ... have forced us to be much more highly demanding of our sources. With the traditional edifice of history definitely brought down, one could now proceed to the reconstruction.[19]

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16 Ibid., p. 26.
17 Ibid., p. 26.
18 Ibid., p. 62, note 16.
19 Ibid., p. 27.

In the same decade of Lammens' book, Richard Bell published his The Origins of Islam in Its Christian Environment.[20] Bell follows the reductionist approach trying to prove that Islam is a borrowed but perverted form of Christianity. He consequently wrote extensively on Muḥammad focusing on his revelation which he dismisses as not genuine.

Rodinson's optimism for reconstruction has been very slow indeed. However, in 1930, the emergence of the German expanded edition of Frants P.W. Buhl's original Danish work broke the lull as it were.[21] Even though the work itself still remains in German, parts of it have appeared as articles in the Encyclopedia of Islam and the Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam. Buhl's work:

> ... contains a considerable mass of information taken from all the available sources, studied and analyzed critically in the light of the discussions of European Islamists, of whom he had an almost exhaustive knowledge. With the robust sense of a good researcher, he rejected both the hypercriticism of certain Arabists and the blind confidence of Muslims in their sources.[22]

Rodinson continues that

> Within the area of its concern, the work has not been excelled and remains an indispensable tool.[23]

Another work which needs mention here is Emile Dermengham's La Vie de Mahomet which was translated into English and published in 1930.[24]

Two years later Theodora Barton's Talks on Mohammed and His Followers joined the list in the decade.[25] In the same year, one of the most experienced European writers on Islam,

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20 London, 1926.

21 See: Das Leben Muhammeds, Translated from the Danish original by H.H. Schneider, (Heideleberg: Quelle und Meyer, 1930).

22 Rodinson, 'A Critical Survey', p. 27.

23 Ibid.

24 It was published under the English title The Life of Mahomet, (London: Routledge).

Arent Jan Wensinck published The Muslim Creed - Its Genesis and Historical Development[26] with the basic assumption that Islamic doctrines were influenced by Greek philosophy in their formative periods.

Even though the book is not primarily a biographical piece, his arguments display a lot of his understanding of the Prophet. Arguing that the Prophet was not concerned with creedal matters, Wensinck writes:

> We may call his a Prophet, a Politician, or both; but was certainly no religious philosopher. Moreover, the change in his career brought about by the hidjra and its consequences, produced a change in his general attitude.[27]

His sympathy for the Jews shows up when he suggests that the 'failure' of Muḥammad to win their crucial recognition was a big blow to him and that made him plan to get rid of them.[28]

The scholar has also written a large number of articles in the Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam on various aspects of the life of the Prophet and those of his family and companions.

It was in the same period that a German Jew using a Muslim pseudonym, Moḥammad Essed Bey, wrote his Mahomet which was later translated from this French original into English under the title Mohammed A Biography.[29] This work is described as deficient in any scholarly methodology and therefore of little worth.[30]

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25 London, Edinburgh House Press, 1932.

26 New York: Macmillan Company, 1932.

27 Ibid., p. 17.

28 Ibid., p. 18. See also his Muhammad and the Jews of Madina with an Excursus Muhammad's Constitution of Madina by Julius Wellhausen. Translated and Edited by Behn, Wolfgang, (Freisburg im Breisgau: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1975).

29 French original published in Paris in 1934, and the English translation in 1936.

30 See Rodinson, "A Critical Survey", p.62, note 19.

Possibly the real limelight in the field was taken by Tor Andrae whose Muḥammad, hans liv och hans tro was published in Swedish.[31] This is an examination of Muḥammad from the perspective of psychology of religion.

In his preface to the English edition, Menzeil writes:

> The study of Moḥammed's life and work is advancing so rapidly that no apology is needed for publishing this excellent study. We have reached a stage where it is possible to approach his personality with a measure of understanding and balance impossible of attainment a few decades ago.[32]

In the introduction, Tor Andrae himself points out that some past amateurish writings looked at religions as entities without any real force behind them. The prophetic initiative of the main personality was played down and even in some extreme cases the very historicity of the Prophet doubted. He argues further that:

> The development of Islam - at least, as compared with the other religions - is open to the clear light of history ...[33]

and therefore lends itself very amenable to any investigation.

Even though the scholar agrees with other Western writers that Muḥammad "borrowed" from other then existing religious sects, he questions the extent to which this theory of lack of originality is sometimes carried. He states that:

> ... it is cheap wisdom to think that this disposes of the question of Moḥammed's originality.[34]

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31 The original was published in Stockholm in 1930. The English edition Muḥammad: The Man and His Faith was translated by Theophil Menzeil and published by Allen and Unwin, London in 1936.

32 Ibid., preface, p. 5.

33 Ibid., p. 10.

34 Ibid., p. 11.

He emphasises that all the "borrowing" notwithstanding, Islam has a uniqueness which defies understanding from others. The author explains that much of the causes of Western neglect of Muslim piety could be traced to ignorance or vestiges of the already debunked theories from the confrontation era of the Middle Ages. He says:

> The cause lies deeper, and may perhaps be expressed by the proverb: 'Relatives understand each other last of all'. A Christian sees much in Islam which reminds him of his own religion, but he sees it in an extremely distorted form. He finds ideas and statements of his own religion, but which, nevertheless, turn off into strangely different paths.[35]

Tor Andrae thus justifies the writing of his book which seems to say that there is the need for people to know more about Islam and especially about the Prophet because what they are used to is biased.

Some of the works in this era had their focus turned on the search for the origins of Islam. Many, of course, as Tor Andrae has pointed out, found the answer in the Judaeo-Christian traditions.

Indeed, the scholar himself traces much of what the Prophet preached from Mani and other Gnostic sects in those days. He presumes that Muḥammad learnt from these sects that Christianity was just one of the numerous groups around which have been graced with Divine guidance. Again, the Prophet, he argues, learnt that every people had had a prophet for his people. This, to Tor Andrae, was the secret of the Prophet's vocation. He asserts that:

> To imagine that the revelation came first - and Mohammed's conception of his call was only an interpretation which had already occurred - does away with any possibility of explaining the matter psychologically.[36]

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35 Ibid., p. 12.

36 Ibid., p. 149. See also Chapt. IV on 'Muḥammad's doctrine of Revelation'.

Rodinson, on his reflection on the subject agrees with the argument that:

> Islam was not born in a sealed container in an environment sterilized against the germs of other ideologies as contemporary Muslim authors and certain others frequently imagine.[37]

However, he also advises that the idea should be applied judiciously and not be allowed to run into excessiveness. Because, as he reasons, the theory has the inherent danger of denying the fundamental originality of every tradition, including Islam. He further argues that there is this:

> ... evident fact that a study of influence cannot fully explain the origin of a new ideological phenomenon or its own particular dynamism. One must never under any circumstances or in any area shun a structural analysis which takes into account the functional necessity of the new ideology.[38]

In Tor Andrae's concluding chapter on 'Moḥammed's Personality' he points out that:

> The concepts of the period of Enlightenment permitted a more just estimate of Moḥammed's personality.[39]

Despite this, the book carries some very medieval images of the Prophet. He mentions Muḥammad's "craftiness and trickery", slyness and his moral weakness which made him give:

> ... free rein to his sensual impulses.[40]

Samuel M. Zwemer, in his comments on the book, cites some of such opinions which are critical of Muḥammad.[41] To Marmaduke Pickthall, Tor Andrae has:

> ... two voices in his work, one suave and judicial, the other harsh and fanatical.[42]

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37 Rodinson, "A Critical Survey", p. 25.
38 Ibid.
39 Tor Andrae, Moḥammed, p.243.
40 Ibid., p. 265. See also pp. 256-69.
41 See his 'Tor Andrae's Mohammed', in MW XXVI No. 3, (July 1936), pp. 217-21.
42 Book Review of: Mohammed: The Man and His Faith in IC XI No. 1 (January 1937), p. 150.

He gives examples of such 'two-voice' methodology. He writes:

> He rules out the idea of deliberate imposture, yet on many pages he seems to write of the Qur'ān as the work of the man Muḥammad and even charges him with such manipulation of it as might as well be described as deliberate imposture.[43]

Pickthall again refers to a statement from page 55 of the book which says:

> It is said that he was known by the epithet Al-Amin, 'the reliable', *and even if this designation does not seem to express the most apparent trait of Mohammed's character*, it does show that he had an unusual power of inspiring confidence.[44]

The reviewer continues citing several other examples which makes the beautifully state objective of the book lose its significance and probably becomes just one of those typical in the field of Orientalism. That is why, one can assume, perhaps Pickthall ends his review with the statement:

> The translator in his preface expresses with, perhaps, unconscious sarcasm a hope that the book will appeal, among others, to 'adherents of Islam'.[45]

Following Tor Andrae was Richard Bell's two volume work on the Qur'ān.[46] As the title suggests, Bell sets out to rearrange the surahs of the Qur'ān, according to him, chronologically. As the author himself says in his preface to the first volume:

> The main objective has been to understand the deliverances of Muḥammad afresh, as far as possible in their historical setting, and therefore to get behind the traditional interpretation.[47]

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43 Ibid., see pp. 59-65 of Tor Andrae's text itself.

44 Ibid. The italics belong to the reviewer - Pickthall.

45 Ibid., p. 154.

46 The Qur'ān - Translated with a Critical Rearrangement of the Sūrahs, 2 vols., (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1937-1939).

47 Ibid., p. v.

Bell is of the opinion that due to attachment to dogmatic belief, Muslim commentators are sometimes not able to get to the bottom of things. His work is therefore meant to clear up some of such 'difficulties' as he sees them. He however admits that he very often relies on his own presuppositions to resolve some seemingly knotty issues.[48] He even supplies words which are not there in English,[49] and believes that the Qur'ān is a personal document produced by Muḥammad himself.

The other major work of the scholar, also on the Qur'ān, was published in 1953 and was supposed to be an accompanying book to the translation of the Qur'ān[50] In this latter work, he emphasises that the central place the Qur'ān occupies in the general thought and life of a large section of the world's population makes it imperative that it is studied. the work is therefore not meant for specialists but the general public. On Muḥammad, Bell believes that:

> All intimate questions regarding the prophet's personality, his inspiration, claim and purposes, can be answered only on the basis of study of the Qur'ān.[51]

This reasoning flows from his earlier-held opinion that Muḥammad was the author of the Qur'ān and hence it is a sort of autobiography.[52]

W. Montgomery Watt revised and enlarged this work and was published in 1970 as part of the Islamic Survey Series.[53] Watt was a student of Bell but he sets out to examine his teacher's work critically.

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48 Ibid.

49 See Ibid., pp. vii-viii.

50 Introduction to the Qur'ān, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1953).

51 Ibid.

52 See his The Qur'ān, p. vi;
and his articles: 'The Development of Mohammed's Personality' in MW IV, No. 4, (Oct. 1914), pp.353-64;
and: 'Muhammad's Visions' in MW XXIV, No. 2, (April 1934), pp. 145-54.
see also: F.H. Foster: 'An Autobriography of Mohammed' in MW XXVI, No. 2, (April 1936), pp.130-52.

53 Bell's Introduction to the Qur'ān, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1970), (reprinted 1990).

As he points out in the foreword:

> The sincerest tribute to a scholar is to take his views seriously and criticize him frankly.[54]

He disagrees with Bell's notion that the Qur'ān was Muḥammad's own handiwork. He stresses:

> Courtesy and an eirenic outlook certainly now demand that we should not speak of the Qur'ān as the product of Muḥammad's conscious mind; but I hold that the same demand is also made by sound scholarship. I have therefore altered or eliminated all expressions which implied that Muḥammad was the author of the Qur'ān, including those which spoke of his 'sources' or of the 'influences' on him.[55]

In a critical analysis of the book, S. Vahiduddin points out that Bell's appreciation of the Qur'ān is typical of the Western Orientalists' 'arid criticism'.[56]

Looking at the prejudiced way in which some of these critical methodologies are applied when it comes to the Qur'ān or the Prophet, Vahiduddin states with regret that:

> Generally, the European scholars, who have undertaken a critical scrutiny of the Qur'ān, seem to believe in God and in the possibility of divine communication but seem to deny it in the particular case of the prophet of Islam. ..... They then try to understand the Qur'ān by a psychological analysis of the prophet's life, by the historical situation and social environment in which he grew. Mr Bell, like others before and after him, is of this way of thinking.[57]

He seriously questions the methodology of finding Muḥammad outside himself and cites a statement purported to have been made by Hegel that:

> The sun of the spirit is always new,...

Islamic Surveys - 8.

54 Ibid., p. v.

55 Ibid., p. vi.

56 'Richard Bell's Study of the Qur'ān: A Critical Analysis' in I.C. XXX No. 3 (July 1956), pp. 263-72. See p. 263.

57 Ibid., p. 264.

continuing that:

> ... it is to be observed that every work of a genius, whether in religion or art or thought, is unique in its own way and cannot be understood by anything outside itself.[58]

He advises that by judging the Prophet through our own lenses, we need also to ponder over the question whether the criteria we are using would stand up to all the rigours of testing as required in modern critical scholarship or else we would be reading ourselves into the Prophet.

In the decade which followed, we could mention the doctoral thesis of J.C. Wilson submitted to the University of Edinburgh.[59] Perhaps the significance of this thesis lies in the fact that it was written in Edinburgh, the place where both Muir and Watt were professors and at a time when Richard Bell was also at that University.

It was in the same year that Gibb's Mohammedanism was published.[60] One of the essential objectives of Gibb was to improve the work of Margoliouth published under the same title in 1911 arguing that thirty five years has been a long time enough for a relook at the subject. He explains thus:

> Between one generation and the next, the bases of judgement necessarily suffer change. They are modified firstly in the material or scientific sense, by the discovery of new facts and the increase of understanding which results from the broadening and deepening of research.[61]

He also talks of what he calls:

> ... the spiritual and imaginative sense.[62]

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58 Ibid., p. 272.
59 Muhammad's Prophetic Office as Portrayed in the Qur'ān, Ph.D. Thesis, Edinburgh University, 1949.
60 Gibb, H.A.R., Mohammedanism - An Historical Survey, (London: Oxford University Press, 1949).
61 Ibid., preface, p. v.
62 Ibid.

pointing out that factual knowledge alone is not enough.

Gibb identifies two camps in the writings on Islam. The first group which he says consists of Muslims, he argues, basically produce apologetic literature to answer back to the critics of Islam. The second group, he points out, are mainly of the Christian clergy who seek to project Islam and indeed Muḥammad as inferior. He explains that there is some element of prejudgement in both groups. In his work, he indicates an effort to steer clear of both groups.

The scholar then writes that he tackles the subject with the fundamental thesis that:

> ...Islam is an autonomous expression of religious thought and experience, which must be viewed in and through its own principles and standards...[63]

Together with this, he stresses:

> ... upon the ideals which it strives to realise than upon the failings of our common humanity.[64]

Even though only chapters two and three might be strictly relevant to our present work, these stated objectives are quite significant in the development of works on Muḥammad and Islam in the West.

Gibb looks at the confrontations the Prophet had with his enemies and defends him thus:

> It would... be a serious mistake to imagine that Mohammed's interest and attention during these years were given up solely to politics and war. On the contrary, the centre of all his preoccupations was the training, educating and discipling of his community.[65]

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63 Ibid., p. vii.
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid., p. 30.

He ends his discussion on Muḥammad with an appreciative statement. He says:

> For us, it goes without saying that the hold which Muhammad gained over the wills and affections of his companions was due to the influence of his personality. Without that they would have paid little heed to the claims of the prophet. It was because of his moral qualities, not because of his religious teaching, that the men of Medina invoked his assistance.[66]

William A. Polk's article on Gibb gives the reader a glimpse of his capabilities. He describes Gibb's tenure at both Oxford and Havard, his expertise in Oriental language, history and culture and the holistic approach he used in his works. He then writes in the conclusion:

> ... Gibb must be reckoned as the last and perhaps the greatest of the true Orientalists, a man who rode nearly to the end of its most productive course that great wave of intellectual inquiry.[67]

4.1.3 THE SECOND HALF OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY.

The 1950's saw a new wave of biographies coming up. The French work of Regis Blachere though not yet rendered into English deserves mention because of its fame.[68] According to Watt[69], this work is based on the theory that the Qur'ān is the only reliable source for the biography of Muḥammad. Rodinson's comments on the book read:

> It is clear, precise, and well thought out. Taking a mediating position between an uncritical view of the source and a hypercritical stance, and thoroughly steeped in the literature on the subject, Blachère underscores very clearly the serious problem presented by the sources viewed from a critical perspective. He regards the Qur'ān as the only fully reliable source and utilizes biographical tradition with great caution.[70]

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66 Ibid., pp. 33-4.

67 'Islam and the West - Sir Hamilton Gibb Between Orientalism and History' in IJMES 6 (1975), pp.131-39. See p. 139.

68 Regis Blachère, Le Proleme de Mahomet, Essai de biographie Critique du fondateur de l'Islam, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1952).

69 Watt, W. M.: Bell's Introduction to the Qur'an, see p. 177.

70 Rodinson, 'A Critical Survey', p. 46. Bell used the same argument in his Introduction to the Qur'ān, vide

Geo Widengren released his The Ascension of the Apostle and the Heavenly Book in 1950[71] and followed up in 1955 with the Muḥammad the Apostle of God and His Ascension. The latter is the second part of the former. The author states in the preface to the 1955 publication that some Arabic material he was waiting for could not be obtained and that has led to some inconsistencies in the work. He again admits of his lack of expertise in Arabic literature. He follows Tor Andrae's theory of Muḥammad appropriating much of his ideas on revelation from Mani.[72]

In a deduction by looking at Shiism and Sunni Islam, Widengren concludes from his study that just as it was in ancient Mesopotamia and other ancient kingdoms, the Prophet's ascent was necessary to be invested with the desired authority. He explains:

> Thus within Islam two types of religion equally well known from the history of Christianity stand out clearly against each other: the institutional type, asserting that Revelation is brought once for all in its definite form by a Divine Saviour, or by a prophet who is not to appear again until possibly at the end of time, and the other, the charismatic type, claiming that inspiration is carried on by means of visions from God, through the incarnation of God, or God's Light or Spirit, or of the Heavenly Apostle in new earthly representatives who together form a long chain of successive 'descents' of the same Divine Being, the Heavenly Apostle.[73]

Rodinson remarks:

> Widengren attempts to situate Muḥammad in the framework of a typology of the Celestical messenger.[74]

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supra note 50. See also the articles in note 52.

71 Uppsala, Sweden A-B, Lundequistska Bokhandeln, 1950.

72 See Tor Andrae, Mohammed, chapter IV.

73 Muḥammad the Apostle of God and His Ascension, pp. 215-6.

74 'A Critical Survey', p. 54.

It was in 1953 and in 1956 that Watt published his definite works on Muḥammad Muḥammad at Mecca and Muḥammad at Medina respectively. The two books were later abridged into a combined volume of Muḥammad Prophet and Statesman which was published in 1961. These works have had considerable impact on the English medium students of Islam. Again, since they form the main basis for this chapter, we would return to them later.

Alfred Guillaume's A Translation of Ibn Is'ḥāq's Sīrat Rasūl Allah[75] which appeared in 1955 deserves a particular mention. In his introduction Guillaume concedes that:

> My predecessors in translating the Sira have made many mistakes and I cannot hope to have escaped all the pitfalls.[76]

This work, which is based on Ibn Hishām's recension, has been heavily reviewed by both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars and some of these would be mentioned here.

One significant thing that Guillaume does in his book is to point out general Muslim scholarly opinion on the reputation of Ibn Is'ḥāq as a historian. This perception has largely been unfavourable. However, the general view of the Western scholars is that Ibn Is'ḥāq's reputation is not impugned as such.

Guillaume himself argues that since much of the criticisms of Ibn Is'ḥāq is directed against his work on Sunan, his biographical writing should not be affected.[77]

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75 Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955.
76 Ibid., p. xli.
77 Ibid., p. xxxiv.

In a review of the book[78], James Robson lauds Guillaume for the invaluable service he has done to Sīra scholarship by rendering Ibn Is'ḥāq's work into English. On Ibn Is'ḥāq himself, Robson says:

> While we may speak highly of him, his detractors vary in their opinion, some regarding him as an authority on biographical details but not on legal matters, others refusing to have anything to do with him. We are here interested in him as a biographer, and there is every reason to believe that he tried to be as accurate as possible.[79]

Robson then says of the translation itself that, it is

> ... very good and very readable.
> ... One is grateful for this accurate and attractive translation....[80]

R.B. Serjeant, in his review,[81] describes the work as an outstanding piece which is bound to be a fitting memorial to Guillaume's position as the professor of Arabic at the University of London.

After suggesting a number of changes in the rendering of certain Arabic expressions, Serjeant concludes rather appreciatively. He writes:

> The achievement of its author in presenting Muhammad to the English-speaking world with a sweet clarity unknown before, will be immediately recognized by scholars and writers as outstanding.[82]

Rodinson's estimation of the book is that despite the criticisms, which he considers as minor,

> ... it is on the whole deserving of confidence.[83]

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78 See: MW XLVI No. 3, (July 1956), pp. 272-3.
79 Ibid., p. 272.
80 Ibid., p. 273.
81 See BSOAS XXI, Part 1, (1958), pp. 1-14.
82 Ibid., p. 14.
83 Rodinson, 'A Critical Survey', p. 45.

A.L. Tibāwi, on the other hand, writes a rather lengthy and near-dismissive critique of Guillaume's translation. He starts by saying that:

> ...Professor Guillaume is not merely offering a translation of the received text of the biography of Muḥammad, as recorded by Ibn Hishām from al-Bakka'i, from Ibn Is'hāq. His work is a translation of his own reconstruction of Ibn Is'haq.[84]

He goes on to argue that the German rendering of Ibn Hishām by Weil (1864) and the earlier one by Wustenfeld (1858-60) were much better and did not deserve the criticism by Guillaume indicated in his introductory remarks. He adds:

> The reviewer (and the reader) who is in a hurry need have no qualms: the translator has an established reputation; the book is well produced and has the imprimatur of a famous publishing house. But if he has time for close examination, comparison, and check, he will find that this translation raises more problems than it solves.[85]

Tibawi questions the propriety in Guillaume's methods of reconstructions, omissions, conjectures, abbreviations and additions indicating a number of cases. These, he argues, have greatly affected the quality of the translation and has possibly resulted in the:

> ... dismemberment of Ibn Hishām and the adulteration of Ibn Is'hāq.[86]

He goes on cataloguing a number of quite minor mistakes in the translation of certain Arabic expressions but explaining that the cumulative effect of all this should be grave enough for serious concern.[87]

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84 'Ibn Is'ḥāq's Sīra, A Critique of Guillaume's Translation (The Life of Muhammad)' in IQ Vol. III, No. 3, (Oct. 1956) (pp. 196-214), p. 197.

85 Ibid., p. 198.

86 Ibid., p. 199.

87 See Ibid., pp. 200-6 for examples Tibāwi enumerates.

He expresses dissatisfaction with, what he believes to be, lack of detailed estimation of Ibn Is'haq as a historian. Further he argues that:

> Any detailed study of the sira - and one cannot translate it scientifically without such a study - should yield new information or throw fresh light upon early Muslim historiography.[88]

None of these is obviously found in the work. Tibāwī accuses Guillaume of not making a clear distinction between the usage of 'Allah' in pre-Islamic belief and the Islamic meaning. Citing examples from the translation, he rightly indicates that this could lead to a serious misconception.[89] He ends the critique with this rather harsh judgement:

> The specialist would no doubt make his own assessment; but to the general reader, and in particular the student of comparative religion, a word of warning is absolutely essential. As it stands, Professor Guillaume's translation cannot be accepted as a reliable reproduction of the received Arabic text of the Sīra.[90]

Professor Guillaume, in the previous year (1954) had published his other work entitled Islam[91] which was supposed to present the essence of the teachings of the Prophet to the Western reader.

In this book, the second, third and fifth chapters dubbed 'Muḥammad', 'The Qur'ān' and 'Apostolic Tradition' respectively are of some significance to this general survey. In his

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88 Ibid., p. 207.
89 See: Ibid., pp. 211-2. See Guillaume's translation: pp. 49, 51 & 68 for examples.
90 Tibāwī, 'A Critique of Guillaume's Translation', p. 214.
91 Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1954.

opening statements on the chapter on Muḥammad, Guillaume declares:

> In writing of a man who is loved and venerated by millions of the world's citizens today, one would wish to be purely objective so far as the greatest monument to Muhammad's memory - the Qur'ān - is concerned, that is not difficult; but his biography is much more difficult to deal with. To translate without comments the statements of his biographers without historical criticism would be misleading; on the other hand, to generalize as some Western scholars have done would be rash.[92]

This sets the tone for one to appreciate the enormity of the strain the Western non-Muslim scholar has to undergo in handling Islamic material. Perhaps this is also true of all scholars who deal with religious materials of faiths they do not profess.

Even though Guillaume repudiates some of the old theories about Muḥammad like the one on epilepsy, he sticks to the traditional Orientalist's argument that he came under heavy influence from the religious environment of the day. He asserts, that since not much is known of Muḥammad's life between the period of his marriage and that of his call, he might have learnt from some Jews and Christians.[93]

Hasan Karmi reviews this book and points out some controversial issues that Guillaume raises.[94] He takes issue with the author on his interpretation of some Hajj rituals as heathen practices and also his comments on the confrontations with the Jews as not expected

> ... from one who comes with a message from the Compassionate and Merciful.[95]

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92 Ibid., p. 20.
93 See Ibid., p. 30.
94 See IQ II No. 1, (April 1955), pp. 61-5.
95 Guillaume, Islam, p. 48.
See also Hasan Karmi's Review, p. 62 ff.

The general perception of the reviewer, therefore, is that Professor Guillaume has misrepresented many of the material concerning the Prophet, the Qur'ān and Islam in general.

It was in the same decade that Kenneth Cragg wrote his The Call of the Minaret.[96] Even though it has only a chapter which directly relates to the field currently under discussion, its general tone makes it worthy of mention.

Cragg's focus has mainly been on Christian-Muslim Relations. This major work which focuses on the *adhān*, seeks to unearth

> ... the clue to Islam, and from that clue to learn the form and dimension of Christian relation to what it tells,....[97]

The 1986 edition contains additional material to take care of some contemporary changes in the religious history since the 1950's when the original work was published. Despite his stated efforts to present Islam as it could be gleaned from the *adhān*, the author seemed to have been caught in the same web as earlier Western Christian writers. He has a particularly emotive sympathy for the Jews and portrays Muḥammad as perhaps a callous man who dispossess the weak to enrich his followers. A typical example is his comments on the case of the Banū Qurayẓah. He writes:

> There followed the massacre of the Banū Qurayzah which marks the darkest depth of Muslim policy, a depth which palliatives suggested by some modern Muslim historians fail to measure.[98]

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96 Published originally in New York by Oxford University Press, 1956.
Several editions of this book were issued later and this is indicative of the interest it caused. For example: Reprinted in 1964 as a Galaxy Book by Oxford University Press; Second Revised Edition published by Orbis Books, 1985; and William Collins & Sons published another edition in 1986.

97 Ibid., p. viii.

98 Ibid., p. 87 (1956 original).
The statement survives in the 1986 edition.

Muhammad Hamidullah has also reviewed the original edition *in extenso*.[99] He is of the opinion that despite the charming methodology which differs from his predecessor, at the Hartford Seminary (S.M. Zwemer), Cragg's book

> ... gives a new look to Christian polemics against Islam, and presents a sugar-coated pill.[100]

He accuses Cragg of displaying an underlying thesis of the superiority of Christianity as against Islam. He therefore invites Muslims to read the book

> ... if they wish to be up to date regarding the contemporary methods of Christian Missions.[101]

Cragg has written quite vigorously on Islam but his other major work which appropriately fits the domain we have set ourselves to discuss here is the one titled Muhammad and the Christian - A Question of Response.[102] This work is supposed to be a reaction to a consistent Muslim call for Christian appreciation and indeed acceptance of Muḥammad ostensibly reciprocating the Muslim acceptance of Jesus. It is therefore meant to educate the Christian as to how to respond to such Muslim desire. As he himself says in the preface:

> It is the aim of this study to offer at least one Christian's view of a resolution of the problem, a resolution which, no more than tentative, remains loyal to Christian criteria while outlining a positive response to Muhammad.[103]

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99 See IQ III No. 4, (January 1957), pp. 245-9.
100 Ibid., p. 245.
101 Ibid., p. 249.
102 London: Darton, Longman & Todd; 1984.
His other works include:
The Event of the Qur'ān, (London: Allen & Unwin, 1971).
The Mind of the Qur'ān, (London: Allen & Unwin, 1973).
The Wisdom of the Sūfis, (London: Sheldon, 1974).
This Year in Jerusalem, (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1982).
Readings in the Qur'ān, (London: Collins, 1988).
and Troubled by Truth - Life Studies in Interfaith Concern, (Edinburgh, Durham etc.: The Pentland Press, 1992).
103 Muḥammad and The Christian, p. ix.

The author picks up one central issue which, he argues, keeps the intransigence between Muslims and Christians alive. It has to do with the question of prophethood. He points out that, to the Christians, it was a sort of an affront for Muḥammad to claim to supersede the finality in the person of Jesus which he believed and trusted in so much.

Hermansen, in his review of the book, has this to say:

> ...the Muslim reader may be disturbed by Cragg's recurrent hints that it would be preferable for Muslims to have a more Christ-like appreciation of Muḥammad (p.79). Cragg's work has in the past been criticised by Islamicists and Historians of Religion for 'Christianizing' Islam by making comparisons which misrepresent the insider's view. This trend is not absent in the present work,...[104]

A typical example is seen when Cragg looks at some Muslim salutations on the Prophet and suggests that there is an intrinsic meaning of 'sonship' of Muḥammad to God. He likens it to the New Testament declaration:

> 'This is my Son, My Beloved, hear him'.[105]

The 1960's saw another 'fruitful' decade of writings on Islam in general and on Muḥammad in particular.

It was in 1960 that Norman Daniel's epic volume Islam and the West-The Making of an Image was published.[106] The work which has been revised (1993) is a compendium and critique of attempts by mainly Christian writers to shape public opinion on Muḥammad through some derisory writings. A seminal work, the author passed away not long before the revised

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104 M.K. Hermansen, 'Kenneth Cragg, Muḥammad and the Chrisitan' (Mary Knoll: N.Y. Orbis Books 1984) in AJISS Vol. 2 No. 1, (July 1985), p. 131.

105 Muḥammad and the Christian, p. 65.
See: Matthew 17:5; see also 3:17 and Mark 9:7.

106 Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1960.

edition went to the press. In the comments on the jacket of the new edition we read the following commendations. F.J. Ziadeh says:

> No scholar of Islam can afford to miss it.

Sir Hamilton Gibb describes it as a:

> Masterly analysis

and J. Kritzeck sees it as:

> As excellent book... now the indispensable work on the subject.

He further says, it is:

> Wonderfully learned, beautifully written.

Daniel presents a myriad of medieval invectives against Muḥammad and points out that a 'communal opinion' has been built in the Western non-Muslim consciousness about the Prophet which is difficult to excise.[107] He however suggests that contemporary Orientalists have somehow moved away from the ignorance and prejudice of their medieval predecessors.

Anees and Athar, in their partly annotated bibliographical work call this:

> ... an unsuccessful attempt to absolve the modern Orientalists of their prejudice against Islam.[108]

M.M. Ahsan, in his review of the work points out that Daniel's opinion is true only:

> ... in the sense that the naked malice of the attack on Islam, characteristic of the academic and pseudo-academic writings of the medieval period, has somehow worn away. But to claim that hostility to Islam has ceased is an over-simplification or perhaps misrepresentation of the fact.[109]

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107 Ibid., see Chpt. IX entitled "The Establishment of Communal Opinion".

108 Guide to Sīra, item no. 1574, p. 179.

109 in MWBR Vol. 1 No. 3 (Spring 1981), p. 53.

In 1961, P.S.R. Payne's The Holy Sword - The Story of Islam from Muḥammad to the Present[110] appeared on the market. The title of the book perhaps offers one a glimpse of the hidden agenda of the author. Michael Edwarde's The Life of Muḥammad, Apostle of Allah followed this in 1964.[111] This is described by Anees and Athar as:

> Based on selections from Ibn Is'hāq's Sīrat Rasūl Allah.[112]

1967 saw the reissued edition of C.C. Torrey's The Jewish Foundation of Islam originally published in 1933.[113] The work is a compilation of five lectures delivered as part of The Hilda Stich Stroock Lecture Series. It basically uses the reductionist methodology where the origin of 'Muḥammad's ideas' are traced to Judaism. The objective was primarily to refute the then ongoing general opinion that Islam was founded on Christian principles, a theory that Julius Wellhausen, Tor Andrae, Karl Ahrens and others have tried to propagate. Torrey, as it is with others like Bell, sees Muḥammad as the author of the Qur'ān. To reinforce this assumption, he has to forcefully deny the fact that Muḥammad was not formally educated. The reasoning is basically that if he was not formally educated, then how could anyone attribute authorship of the Qur'ān to him? So he needs to be educated to fit the thesis. He writes in the 1933 edition that:

> The Orthodox Muslim dogma that Muḥammad was an unschooled man is utterly untenable, though even the most recent treatises continue to give it some credence.[114]

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110 London: Robert Hall, 1961.
111 London: The Folio Society, 1964.
112 Guide to Sīra, item no. 923, p. 104.
113 New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1967.
The 1933 original was also from New York published by the Jewish Insitute of Religion Press.
114 Ibid., preface, p. v.

He continues that Muḥammad:

> ... was at all times sincere, never doubting that the self-hypnotism which he had learned to produce, and which he continued to practise at critical times, brought him a divine revelation.[115]

In a well-written introduction to the 1967 edition, Franz Rosenthal describes the academic arrogance often associated with Torrey. He criticises Torrey for making assertions which are difficult to sustain in a scholarly manner. For example, he writes:

> It is unmistakable that an approach concerned primarily with attempts to demonstrate dependence on earlier stages of the historical process is no longer able to command the loyalty of historians and is considered by many rather elementary or even primitive.[116]

He ends the write-up thus:

> Torrey's work contains a good deal that is debatable or even wrong. It may no longer be within the mainstream of Islamic Research, and many of today's Islamists may be unresponsive to its approach and its technique.[117]

Before the end of that decade E.R. Pike's Mohammed-Prophet and the Religion of Islam which was originally published in New York in 1962 was reissued in London in 1968.[118]

The work of Francesco Gabrieli originally in Italian and which appeared in 1968 needs to be mentioned here as an attempt at a balanced historical account of Muhammad and the spread of Islam.[119]

In the 1970's, the major works we come across perhaps begin with John Bagot Glubb's The Life and Times of Muhammad[120] which carries a large discussion on the *sunnah.*

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115 Ibid.

116 Ibid., p. xv.

117 Ibid., p. xxii.

118 London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968. Originally published as Mohammed - Founder of the Religion of Islam, (New York, Roy Publishers, 1962).

119 Muhammad and the Conquests of Islam, translated from the Italian by Virginia Luling and Rosamund Linell, (London, George Weidenfeld and Nicolson Ltd., 1968), esp. Chpt. 1-5.

The French work of Maxime Rodinson translated into English by Anne Carter appeared in 1971.[121] An academically well-written book by a Jewish-Marxist author, it seeks to present a sociological analysis of the life of the Prophet. His subsequent writings have always exacted scholarly interest and attention.

In this major book on the Prophet, he comments that he took up certain issues which he thought have not been considered sufficiently enough. He writes that his objective was:

> ... to show the relationship between the eschatological visions of the early preachings of Muhammad and the international political situation of that period. Taking the sociological correlations of his preachings as established (notably by Watt),... to show how a personal, psychological evolution shaped Muhammad into an instrument capable of formulating and communicating an ideology that correspond to the needs of the time and the milieu.[122]

Rodinson's brilliance often carries evidence of his Marxist leanings. He yearns for an interpretation of Muḥammad and Islam through a:

> ... historiography freed from the chains of theology.[123]

Even though he is cautious about the psychoanalytic explanation of the personality of Muḥammad as advocated by scholars like the Frenchman Regis Blachère, the Finnish Harri Holman and the Swedish Tor Andrae, Rodinson recommends that scholars:

> ... should go beyond the purely religious sphere and give a total explanation to this exceptional personality.[124]

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120 London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1970.

121 Mohammed, (London, The Penguin Press, 1971).

122 Rodinson: 'A Critical Survey' in: Swartz Studies on Islam, p. 50.

123 Ibid., p. 51.
How this methodology could still leave 'Muhammad the prophet' intact is something that might puzzle the student of theology and even history.

124 Ibid., p. 53.

His comments on the development of *aḥādith* puts so much emphasis on the role played by political interests, individual curiosity and piety that the reader senses his rejection of the whole package. He asserts that even though scholars tried to sift the myriad of reports,

> ... they made no claims to any degree of certainty. Instead, they were content to repeat contradictory traditions on the same subject, one after the other, quoting their sources for each. It was upto the reader to decide which one he liked to believe.[125]

His whole analysis of the battles the Prophet and his people fought and other minor confrontations in Madīna betrays where Rodinson's sympathy lies. The Jews, as it can be understood, are portrayed as innocent people who happened to be at the wrong place at the wrong time and in each of the cases, their fate had already been decided before the incident which finally brought either their expulsion or execution came.[126]

The 1980's onwards saw an increase in the writings on Islam but mainly in the area of inter-faith relations and other fields of Islam.

On the Prophet, perhaps mention should be made of the work edited and translated by Merlin L. Swartz.[127] The most significant paper here is the long 'A Critical Survey of Modern Studies on Muhammad' by Rodinson which we have made extensive use of in the work.

Michael Cook's Muhammad was released in 1983.[128] It is important to point out that it is this same Cook, who together with Patricia Crone wrote Hagarism-The Making of the Islamic World.[129]

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125 Mohammed, p. 43.

126 Ibid. see Chapter 5 characteristically entitled 'The Prophet in Arms'.

127 See: Studies on Islam.

128 Oxford, Oxford University Press.

129 Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1977.
We point this out because of the disparaged reviews this joint publication has received.

This latter work which follows the reductionist methodology, does not see any originality in Islam and indeed in Muḥammad. In fact, Anees and Athar describes it as:

> Relying on documents of questionable authority coupled with gross aberrations of style,... It is a mockery of scholarship that set out to show that the Muslim concepts of revelation and prophethood were born in the Judaic cradle.[130]

M.D. Valimamed in his review of this joint publication also seriously questions the central argument of the book and even the methodology applied by the two scholars. He writes:

> On points of historical methodology, one wonders how the authors are justified in using circumstantially tenuous tracts, putting them together and inferring from these documents conclusions to back a passionate thesis which is clearly untenable? In all seriousness how can one use the following to substantiate that the tradition of prophethood in Islam is actually a botched stem from the Judaic Messianic glory: a tenuously dated and located anti-Jewish tract, the 'Doctrine of Iacobi', an eschatological document written by a rabbi probably in the eighth century; the propensity of Jews to announce the coming of the Messiah as a man dressed in Arab garbs (apparently a tradition that was found socially more acceptable amongst the Jews at the time); and an Armenian opus which is chronologically questionable?[131]

With all these, one would naturally not expect Michael Cook to veer too much away from this central philosophy in Hagarism in his biographical work on Muḥammad.

H.T. Norris reviewing this book criticises Cook for forcing certain conclusions especially about the origins of Islam. However, he ends that the book:

> ... provides a fresh gust of air through the windows of a library of musty books on the subject. Many such books are little more than sanctimonious apologia. This life of Muhammad can hardly be counted amongst their number.[132]

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130 Guide to Sira and Hadith Literature in Western Languages, item no. 1655.

131 in MWBR Vol. 1 No. 2 (Winter, 1981), pp. 7-8.

132 in BSOAS Vol. XLVIII, Pt. 1, (1985), p. 131.

Cook offers some questionable analysis of the Prophet's life. His interpretations of the Prophet's marriages, the status of women in Islam, the so-called 'Satanic Verses' and the encounters with the Quraish and others are seriously controversial. He gives the impression that Muslim scholars are not to be trusted and therefore he offers them no room at all in the book.

Anees and Athar see the book as a

> ... biased, hostile writing about the Sira and Islam.[133]

A.W. Boase, in his review of the book describes it in rather scathing words. He writes:

> ... Michael Cook exhibits great hostility and prejudice for the man Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) and the doctrines of Islam... This is surely a very biased, atheist-tinted vision of Islam.[134]

It is within this rather morass of the intellectual (and sometimes otherwise) perspectives of the Prophet that William Montgomery Watt falls. Within a scenario like this, we might be able to appreciate the works of Watt much better.

We therefore discuss Watt's thinking with the background conviction that no scholar falls into a vacuum. His place in a particular historical, environmental, intellectual and any other context is definitely bound to be of significant interest to the student who undertakes to study him and critique his views.

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133 Guide to Sira, item no. 305, p. 39.

134 in MWBR Vol. 4, No. 3, (1984), pp. 6-7.

4.1.2 CHOICE OF WATT.

From the rather cursory survey of twentieth century literature on Muḥammad one realizes that many of the authors wrote on the subject not as an area of substantial interest but merely as an ancillary issue. Even in cases where the scholars specifically write a biographical material, either their previous or, and subsequent works, indicate that they have a general interest in Islam as a whole and the life of Muḥammad is, as it should be expected, part of this wider interest.

It is not an overstatement to say that among the twentieth century British scholars of Islam, Willaim Montgomery Watt is the most prolific writer in the area of Muḥammad as a specific academic interest. In the Intellectual Biography which follows, this assertion could be proved right.

Despite the general condemnation of the works of Western non-Muslim scholars by Muslims, especially in the field of Sirah scholarship, Montgomery Watt has received some fairly appreciative comments. As compared to other scholars who fall within the Western orientalist school, Watt is perhaps the most respected. In the inner jacket of his work Islam and Christianity Today - A Contribution to Dialogue,[135]one reads the following statement:

> Professor Watt is the leading authority in the English-speaking world on the life of Muhammad and the early history of Islamic theology.

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135 London etc. Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983.

In the foreword to this same book written by Shaikh Ahmed Zaki Yamani, there is an allusion to Watt's eminence among British, and generally, English-speaking scholars on Islam. Shaikh Yamani says:

> Professor Watt has done much in the effort to free the Western mentality of the shackles of prejudice and hatred that originated in the hostilities of medieval times and that have for so long blinded the Western world to the merit of trying to understand Islam. In spite of the phenomenal difficulties inherent in attempting to reconcile positions that are generally regarded as irreconcilable he has achieved a high level of open-mindedness.[136]

He continues that Watt shows

> ... aspirations to the highest degrees of objectivity...[137]

which become evident in some of his statements.

Again, in his review of the book under discussion, Ali Qulī Qarā'ī, the editor of Al-Tawhid giving some information on Watt describes him as,

> ... one of the leading living Orientalists, who has written and compiled a large number of books on various aspects of Islam, Muslim history and Islamic thought.[138]

The reviewer points out that

> W. Montgomery Watt has a sympathetic regard and respect for Islam.[139]

Qarā'ī sees Islam as the ground for Watt's expertise thereby emphasising his competence in the field.

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136 Ibid. p. ix.
137 Ibid.
138 Review article in Al-Tawhid Vol. 11 No. 3, p.136 footnote.
139 Ibid.

He again finds Watt as having a fairer attitude to Islam than most of his contemporaries.

Antonie Wessels also pays homage to Watt by writing:

> In our days, of course, there are very profound and respectable accounts of Muhammad's life (by 'Westerners') like the two volumed one by W.M. Watt, Muhammad at Mecca and Muhammad at Medina, which have been translated into Arabic.[140]

The respect paid to the books indeed reflect on the author's own aptitude.

'Imādudeen Khalīl in his critical study of Watt's thought, appreciates the scholar favourably. He states:

> Unlike the authors of his era he is the first who rendered it necessary to maintain the respect and impartiality. While writing about the unseen foundations in the background of the facts and events of the prophet's life.[141]

'Imadudeen then goes on to offer evidence of Watt's impartiality. He cites Watt's statement in the introduction to his Muhammad at Mecca. Watt states that he has tried to be as respectful and impartial as possible. He continues, giving assurances to his Muslim readers that:

> I have endeavoured, while remaining faithful to the standards of Western historical scholarship, to say nothing that would entail rejection of any of the fundamental doctrines of Islam. There need be no unbridgeable gulf between Western scholarship and Islamic faith; if some of the conclusions of Western scholars have been unacceptable to Muslims, it may be that the scholars have not always been faithful to their own principles of scholarship and that, even from the purely historical point of view, their conclusion requires to be revised.[142]

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140 See his: 'Modern Biographies of the life of the Prophet in Arabic' in IC Vol. 49 No. 2, (April 197)5 (pp. 99-105), p. 99.

141 See his five-part article entitled: "Maqalāt Sīrat Nabawī Awr Mustashriqīn Montgomery Watt Ke Afkar Ka Tanqīdi jā'izah" (Urdu) in Sirat Nabawī Awr Mustashriqin, (August 1987), p. 90.

142 p. x.

Khurshid Ahmad, in his Islam and the West puts Watt among those, who, in this age have endeavoured to change the attitude of Western scholarship on Islam. He sees Watt as being somewhat dispassionate and sympathetic.[143]

A.L. Tibāwī, reviewing Watt's Muhammad Prophet and Statesman censures many a Western scholar for their often hypercritical stance usually using standards which could obviously always end up giving wrong impressions about Islam and especially the holy Prophet. He, however, sees in Watt's contributions

> ... an honest attempt to redress the balance.[144]

He further says of Watt:

> His command of the facts and his imaginative reconstruction of events is admirable, ...[145]

The place of Watt in contemporary English-speaking Orientalists' scholarship on the sirah is further boosted by Syed ʿAlī Raza Naqvī who describes him as

> One of the most prominent modern biographers of the holy prophet, ...[146]

Taking into consideration the fact that the statement together with others which sees Watt as rebutting the harsh criticisms of his fellow Western writers, was made in a paper read at the National Seerat Conference held at Islamabad, one can appreciate the regard Watt has among some Muslim scholars.[147]

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143 Lahore, Islamic Publications, 1979, 4th. Edition, see p. 18.

144 See his review in IQ VI Nos. 3 & 4, (July & Oct. 1961) (pp. 127-8), p. 127.

145 Ibid.

146 'Prophet Muhammad's Image in Western Enlightened Scholarship' (A paper read at the National Seerat Conference held in Islamabad, 19-20th. January 1981) in IS Vol. XX No. 2, (Summer) 1981 (pp. 137-51), p. 147.

147 See Ibid., p. 148.

Khurram Murad also places Watt among the top scholars in the field and appreciates his honesty by sometimes being very precise as to where he stands. He says:

> Watt is a sort of doyen of that 'new' school of orientalists thought to have been kind enough to lend a sympathetic ear and pen to Islam. He is also aware of the serious difficulties he faces as an heir of a 'deep-seated prejudice' from which, he frankly admits, 'we are not yet wholly freed' ...[148]

In another review of the same book What is Islam? A.S. Bazmee Anṣārī despite his critical remarks, admires Watt's openness, and honesty in coming out to point out the problem a non-Muslim Western scholar faces in taking on board Islamic Studies.[149]

Watt's discerning scholarship is yet again referred to in the remarks of Muḥammad Benaboud. He reviews the work Islam: Past Influence and Present Challenge[150] which is a festschrift for Watt by a group of scholars some of whom were his students and others friends and colleagues. Benaboud describes Watt as someone who has

> ... contributed so positively to the field of Orientalism ...[151]

In a rather lengthy but very appreciative comment, he continues that:

> W.M. Watt stands out as a scholar by the high intellectual calibre of his numerous books ... his attitude towards the Eastners he studies and those he contacts is different from that of many of his colleagues. Given his background, training and general orientation, his (sic) is an Orientalist by definition. Yet he has been able to overcome the cultural arrogance that has for so long been widespread among Western Orientalists and to which Eastners are so sensitive. The Eastners are not offended by his criticism which is sometimes quite sharp in substance, but never in form because he is equally critical of the West. This explains his credibility. Furthermore, it is difficult to detect any sense of evil motivation behind his criticism, because he usually criticises to improve and construct.[152]

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148 See his review of Watt's What is Islam? in MWBR Vol. 1 No. 3, (Spring 1981) (pp. 3-9), p. 5.
149 See: HI Vol. IV No. 3, (Autumn 1981), pp. 91-7.
150 Alford T. Welch and Pierre Cachia (eds.) (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1979).
151 See the review in: IQ Vol. XXVI No. 1, (First Quarter 1982) (pp. 56-7), p. 56.
152 Ibid.

Benaboud goes on that Watt is a scholar who accepts criticism with forbearance making even his enemies respect him. He then asserts that

> As an orientalist, he respects the Islamic Culture and is in turn respected by Muslim scholars.[153]

In the book under question, Josef Van Ess in his tribute, explains Watt's capability and methodology in his researches. He points out that in his works, Watt shows

> ... the ability to understand a culture on the level it deserves, by comparing its ideals with our ideals and it deficiencies with ours, without confusing both things in a hasty, even worse, polemical way. ... Through his books, the Europeans - and Christians - have learnt that there are values and modes of life equivalent to theirs, similar in origin and intention, though dissimilar in their individual realization, and the Muslims have felt understood without being unduly flattered.[154]

Valerie J. Hoffman-Ladd states that Watt is a

> ... well-known Edinburgh scholar of Arabic and Islamic Studies who, in a long and distinguished career, has contributed many original works that have become part of the core literature in Western scholarship on Islam.[155]

Indeed, Watt's writings have become 'accepted' literature especially in the non-Arabic speaking Muslim world.

`Andrew Rippin adds to the long list of appreciative comments on Watt in his review of one of Watt's latest publications Early Islam - Collected Articles. He affirms:

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153 Ibid., p. 57.

154 Welch and Cachia (eds.) Islam-Past Influence, p.xiii.

155 See her review of Watt's Islamic Fundamentalism and Modernity in IJMES Vol. 23 No. 3, (Aug. 199)1 (pp. 414-7), p. 414.

> There can be no doubt about William Montgomery Watt's contribution to our field of study. Many of us remember very well the role Watt's writings played in our post-graduate years and it would be churlish not to acknowledge the debt which we owe to this scholar. His works will continue to be significant, will continue to be studied, and, indeed, continue to be refuted where necessary.[156]

Maxime Rodinson's appraisal of Watt's scholarship is very apt in our effort to justify our choice of the scholar's works for this project. Commenting on Watt's book Muhammad at Mecca, Rodinson states:

> The clear and direct way in which he formulates his conclusions on the various events of the prophet's life, the confident fashion in which he employs his conclusions, has appeared to some to indicate an exaggerated confidence in the reliability of these latter. But above all, he is the first one in a very long time to pose the problem of the success of Muhammad's preaching by going beyond the history of religions' viewpoint to which Orientalists, since the trenchant response of Snouck Hurgronje to the simplistic theses of Grimme regarding the purely 'socialist' character of this preaching, have clung.[157]

From the foregoing, one safely concludes that Watt stands in prominence amongst contemporary English speaking Western scholars of Islam and hence his work always exacts special interest.

It is very difficult in twentieth century English scholarship on Islam especially in the specific area of the Sīrah of the Prophet to find anyone comparable. We are here making special reference to qualities that Watt has always brought to bear in his research. In this age under question, notwithstanding the sometimes harsh words against him, compared to the scholars in the field Watt stands out as the best choice for our study.

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156 See his review in BSOAS Vol. LV Part 1, (1992) (pp. 195-6), p. 196.

157 See his: 'A Critical Survey of Modern Studies on Muhammad' in Swartz, Merlin L. (Trans and ed.) Studies on Islam, p. 46.

CHAPTER FIVE

W. MONTGOMERY WATT

5.1 THE MAN WATT AND HIS INTELLECTUAL BIOGRAPHY.

Since there is no detailed biographical publication on Watt, much of the material on his personal background derives from a private interview we had the rare opportunity of conducting with Professor Watt in his home in Dalkeith, Midlothian, Scotland on 23rd. June 1990. Further information is also taken from a questionnaire which we sent him in May 1994 and which he graciously filled and returned to us. Perhaps the only published data as at now is the piece in the 1993 edition of Who's Who.[1]

William Montgomery Watt was born on 14th. of March 1909 in Ceres, Fife, Scotland. he was the only child of Rev. Andrew Watt a Presbyterian minister. The father passed away when Watt was only a year old. His mother whose maiden name was Jean Macdonald is described by Watt in our interview as a truly religious person. He does not say which Christian denomination she belonged to but from the father's position as a Presbyterian minister one could conclude that she was also Presbyterian. He had a good secondary education at George Watson's College, Edinburgh and then went on to the Edinburgh University. He continued his education at the Balliol College and later at the University of Jena, Germany. He was also briefly at the Cuddesdon College Warner Exhibition in 1930 and at the Ferguson School in Classics in 1931. He holds the degrees of MA, PhD (Edinburgh), and MA, BLitt (Oxon.).

His academic career started at the Edinburgh University where he was an assistant lecturer in Moral Philosophy from 1934 to 1938.

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1 Who's Who-An Annual Biographical Dictionary, One Hundred and Forty Fifth Year of Issue, (London: A & C Black, 1993), see p. 1974.

Watt was ordained as a minister in the Anglican Communion in 1940 and was curate at St. Mary Boltons, London (1939-41) and also at Old St. Paul's, Edinburgh (1941-43). To an item on our questionnaire as to his ambitions as a youth, Watt answers that he wanted to be a scientist and then later a philosopher. However, he ended up a clergyman and an academic. When we asked him to explain how he got interested in Islamic Studies his answer included a sense of modesty. He says:

> On my mother's death, to enable me to pay for a housekeeper, I asked a Muslim friend to come as a paying guest and we had long religious discussions over meals. The I heard that the Anglican bishop in Jerusalem wanted to work at the intellectual approach to Islam and I accepted a post under him.[2]

When we again enquired how his interest in interfaith relations developed, his answer was that it grew out of his work in Jerusalem.

It is important to note at this juncture that Watt's interest in Islamic Studies at the intellectual level increased during his period of stay in Jerusalem, the starting point was the experiential encounter with the Muslim house mate. This is significant because many scholars who deal with Islam without this personal positive encounter with those who profess the faith are very likely to have a very different view of, and attitude to, Islam.

Watt's job as the academic specialist to the bishop of Jerusalem took about three years (1943-46). He then went back to his Alma Mater, the Edinburgh University, where he lectured in Ancient Philosophy (1946-47) and later became lecturer and then senior lecturer and Reader in Arabic (1947-64). He became Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies in 1964 and for further good fifteen years in Edinburgh, Watt spent his life dedicated to serious study of Islam especially in the areas of the Sīrah, history and theology.

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[2] Questionnaire, May 1994.

William Montgomery Watt was a visiting Professor: of Islamic Studies in the University of Toronto (1063); College de France, Paris (1970); of Religious Studies, University of Toronto (1978); and of Arab Studies, Georgetown University (1978-79). He was chairman of the Association of British Orientalists (1964-65). In addition to his academic degrees, he holds an honorary degree (Hon. DD.) from the University of Aberdeen (1966) and was also awarded the Levi Della Vida Medal, Los Angeles in 1981.

Watt is by nature a very shy person and one might be inclined to say that he is of the introspective type or even the elusive-kind as we experienced in our personal interaction during the interview in June 1990.

The scholar's publications are too numerous to mention here. Stretching over a period of more than half a century his publications are indicative of an able scholar on almost every aspect of Christianity and Islam even though he has written more under the latter than the former.

He started writing in 1937 and up till the time of this study (in 1994) he still publishes. We do not want to make the arrogant claim of mentioning all his publications because certainly it would be out of place in a work of this nature. We would concern ourselves with some of the key ones and certainly those which fall within the ambit of this thesis.

However, before this is done, we would like to have a general appraisal of the character of his writings. As we have already indicated, Watt's interest in Islamic Studies could partly be attributed to his personal experiential life with a Muslim. Hence, right from the beginning, inter-faith encounter has been at the root of his thinking.

In our interview with him he expressed his worry regarding the rise of fundamentalism in all religions but indicated his optimism that inter-faith relations would improve.

When we asked him for advice to those engaged in Inter-faith Relations, he emphasised the appreciation of the strengths of the positive assertions of the other side. This is a concern which keeps on reverberating in most of Watt's writings on Islam. His dialogical consciousness has however grown tremendously in his later publications.

However, as Josef Van Ess indicates, Watt, as an Anglican clergyman remained on e throughout and hence sometimes his writings could be described as didactic or possibly 'propagandistic'.[3] He was able to do this simultaneously with his academic vocation as an Islamist though.

Van Ess explains that:

> From the very beginning, he saw his task as an Islamist in the dialogue; it was his destiny that he came to live in an ecumenical age. The dialogue was twofold: with his own society which, in happy ignorance, always tended to take its own values for granted, and with the Muslims who did just the same. This is why he tried to distil the fundamental notions of Muslim civilization out of a recalcitrant mass of material; he wanted to make clear the alternatives which Islam, growing out of the same roots as Christianity, is able to offer. It is only with the awareness of these alternatives that a meaningful and unprejudiced dialogue can be started.[4]

This then accounts for the reasons why Watt's writings are so different from his contemporaries and predecessors in the English West on Islam in general and the Sīrah in particular.

The first published book by Watt was in 1937 entitled Can Christians Be Pacifists?[5] His published Islamic material started with an article titled "Freewill and Predestination in

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3 'Tribute to William Montgomery Watt' in Welch and Cachia (eds.), Islam - Past Influence, p.ix.
4 Ibid. p. xiii.
5 Published in London by the Student Christian Movement Press.
A more comprehensive list of Watt's writings up to 1979 could be seen in the Appendix to Welch and Cachia (eds.), Islam-Past Influence.

Early Islam"[6] which was from his PhD thesis submitted to the Edinburgh University in 1944. The thesis itself was published as a book in 1948 by Luzac in London under the same title. As Van Ess writes:

> ... his thesis demonstrated an unusual gift for textual interpretation, combined with a certain lucidity of arrangement which made the argumentation immediately clear to the reader. Yet there was more than sound method and persuasive style. There was also a felling for the individuality of historical situations and ideological decisions which was not so common among philologists. Theology was not treated as an impersonal fight of ideas or, even worse, as a catalogue of notions and values, but as an expression of the way specific persons or groups reacted to the demands of their time.[7]

Theology, in the hands of Watt, became a bit more realistic and meaningful.

In the introduction to this book under discussion, Watt states his aim as trying to explain

> ... the great underlying principles and influences in men's hearts and minds, and the manner in which these are derived from the original intense realization of God.[8]

The scholar goes on point out that

> In order to achieve this aim it is necessary to rid ourselves, as far as may be, of the preconceptions and prejudices of Western thought of the 19th. and 20th. centuries.[9]

Watt's realisation of the heavy encumbrances which weighed down heavily on the minds of many a Western scholar of Islam is admirable. This has also contributed, we can say, to the

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6 See MW XXXVI, (April 1946) No. 2, pp. 124-152.

7 Islam - Past Influence, p. ix.

8 Freewill and Predestination, p.1.

9 Ibid.

intense attempts at objective scholarship which many scholars have alluded to as explained in the early part of this section of the thesis.

Humility, which is one of his personal traits, enables him to accept that biased or subjective and opinionated material abound in the non-Muslim world and hence a scholar should be able to do a lot of unlearning to escape censure.

He demands a fresh and open mind as an indispensable tool in dealing with Islam. Despite this, he states

> Since complete impartiality is impossible, the best I can do is to make explicit the position I myself hold.[10]

This attitude of being plain-spoken is always found in his works where the stance towards a particular subject is laid out. As a man of dialogue, Watt always seeks some positive elements in both Islam and Christianity. In the article based on his PhD thesis, for example, he concludes:

> I would therefore contend that the difference between Western Christianity and Islam (which undoubtedly exists) is not so much a difference between the religions in their pure state as between the cultures and civilization s in which they are embedded.[11]

This is a statement few people would have objections to because Muslims have often argued that the original message of Jesus Christ was of Divine origin and it is even because of this that the Qur'ān emphasises that belief in the original world revealed to the prophets will ensure salvation.[12]

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10 Ibid., pp. 1-2.

11 'Freewilll and Predestination', p. 152.

12 See: Sūrah al-Baqarah (2): 62
al-Mā'idah (5): 68-69.

After a series of articles and book reviews in the late forties and the early fifties, Watt published his next major work in 1953 entitled: The Faith and Practice of al-Ghazzāli.[13] This is a collection of some of the works of al-Ghazzālī which the author translates into English. The book is part of the series the objective of which was to

> ... place the chief ethical and religious masterpieces of the world, both Christian and non-Christian, within easy reach of the intelligent reader who is not necessarily an expert - the ex-serviceman who is interested in the East, the undergraduate, the adult student, the intelligent public generally.[14]

The series initiated by some scholars from Oxford and their colleagues was a result of the feeling brought about by the two world wars. People felt they needed to know each other better and what better way was it to do that than to share the moral and spiritual ideals on both sides.

Watt's appreciation of al-Ghazzālī is evident from his introduction. He points out that:

> Deep study of al-Ghazzāli may suggest to Muslims steps to be taken if they are to deal successfully with the contemporary situation. Christians, too, now that the world is in a cultural melting-pot, must be prepared to learn from Islam, and are unlikely to find a more sympathetic guide than al-Ghazāli.[15]

This further shows Watt's original passion for Inter-Faith Relations.

It was within the same year, 1953, that the scholar's first book on the Sirah appeared.[16] This was followed up with Muhammad at Madina[17] and the two books were summarised into one volume five years later with the title Muhammad - Prophet and Statesman[18] Our discussion on Watt's works would centre around these three books. The earlier two works provide a fairly

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13 This is the eighth in the series entitled: 'Ethical and Religious Classics of East and West' London, George Allen and Unwin, 1953.

14 Ibid., p. 5 General Introduction.

15 Ibid., p. 15.

16 Muhammad at Mecca, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953).

17 Oxrord: Clarendon Press, 1953.

18 London etc.: Oxford University Press, 1961.

detailed account of Muḥammad's life and the ideas set out therein have received much acclaim. These ideas have crystallized into the one-volume abridgement and we do not have evidence to indicate that much has been lost in the process of condensation of thought. If anything at all, one would expect that was published five years after the one on Madina, the ideas have rather sharpened and become even clearer.

These works have been reprinted several times over and have also been translated into many languages including Arabic, French, Japanese, Spanish and Turkish.[19]

In a recently released work of F.E. Peters, nice compliments are paid to these works. Peters compares his own effort to those of Watt and submits that his pales into insignificance in the face of the latter's. He writes that:

> ... undoubtedly, Montgomery Watt's two-volume life of Muhammad written at the mid-century has become the standard for students and scholars alike. Works of such magnitude and conviction usually signal a pause, the reshaping of a new communis opinio, and such seems to have occurred here: no one has since attempted a like enterprise in English.[20]

He continues that while the works of Watt as it were

> ... closed one large door, they opened many others.[21]

The understanding is that if these are judged to have initiated a methodological shift in the area of the life of Muḥammad in English scholarship, and literally shut the door in the face of the old attitude, they also enkindled new interests. These works asked new questions and raised

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19 See Islam - Past Influence , p. x.

20 Muhammad and the Origins of Islam, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), preface p.xi.

21 Ibid.

issues which question known accepted sentiments and hence threw other doors open for productive research in the Century.

Opinions like these then solidly justify our choice of these works as the main focus for the critique.

Returning to the subject of Intellectual Biography, we note that in 1952 Watt published his article entitled "The condemnation of the Jews of Banū Qurayzah" in which a marked sympathy for the Jews is expressed.[22] He argues on the basis of Caetani's understanding of the event that traditional Islamic accounts of the incident strives to save Muḥammad from culpability. The point he makes is that the fact that Sa'd b. Mu'ādh is made to pronounce the judgement is beside the point because

> The sentence ... was in any case dictated and inspired by the Prophet, who certainly made him understand what was the decision required of him. The responsibility for the slaughter falls entirely on the Prophet.[23]

He is of the opinion that the idea that the Jews themselves picked Sa'd as the judge is a later interpolation just to make the traditional version more appealing. The beauty of this article is the length he goes in examining the sources.

Attention is now to be directed towards Watt's concern for Christian-Muslim dialogue which started quite early and became apparent in some of his earlier writings. For example, in 1953, he published an article in which he expressed concern about the Christian usage of the Arabic word 'Allah' instead of 'God' when in communication with Muslims.[24] He argues

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22 in MW vol. 42, (1952), pp. 160-171.

23 Ibid., p.160.
cf. Caetani, L, Annali dell'Islam vol. 1, (Milano: Ulrich Hoepli, 1905-26), p. 632.

24 See 'The Use of the Word 'Allah' in English' in MW XLIII No. 3, (July 1953), pp. 245-247.

strenuously that whatever the motives for this widespread usage are, it is inappropriate and questions whether by doing this Christian missionaries and scholars are not engaged in a

> ... dangerous subjectivism that is tantamount to a denial of the essential realism of Christianity?[25]

He asserts that Muslims have an imperfect conception of God because God did not reveal Himself to them but only to Christians. Hence, he continues, the use of 'Allah' would emasculate the Christian faith instead of God which gives a fuller understanding of the Being the Muslims themselves claim they also worship. He refers to the Qur'ān which talks of the same Being that Christians and Jews worship and points out that even though the Muslim

> ... conception of God was faulty ... their intention to serve Him cannot be doubted.[26]

He reasons that a sound theological communication can only take place when the basis of the discussion is 'God' and not 'Allah' because that conveys a more comprehensive understanding and it is only form here that issues like God's attributes, and revelation could be looked at.

One must admit that the deduction in this article is very difficult to follow but we have to understand that this is the formative period of Watt as an established scholar in the field.

Watt's book on al-Ghazzālī appeared in the same year.[27] This work has been reviewed by Muḥammad Hamīdullah[28] and even though he lauds Watt for the effort in translating the work, he points out certain areas where he accuses him of having offered an incorrect rendering

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25 Ibid., p. 245.
26 Ibid., p. 246.
27 The Faith and Practice of al-Ghazzālī, (London: Allen & Unwin, 1953).
28 in IQ vol. 1 No. 1, (April 1954), pp. 62-64.

of al-Ghazzāli's original. When Watt remarks that despite al-Ghazzali's acceptable opinions sometimes

> ... dark forces of superstition are prominent in the background ...,[29]

Hamīdullah almost retorts:

> Perhaps this remark shows the background also the translator's approach to Islam.[30]

The next published material of Watt which comes readily is the paper on Carlyle read to the Carlyle Society, Edinburgh on October 24, 1953.[31] This paper, an appreciation of the Scotsman's famous lecture in 1840, asserts that Thomas Carlyle's statements represent the first in European literature to strongly affirm the sincerity of Muḥammad.

Watt questions how Carlyle came to the scene almost out of the blue despite centuries of invectives against the Prophet. He looks at the ideas current before and in the age of Carlyle pointing out that the medieval geopolitical picture was too frightening for Western Christendom. He concludes:

> ... on every frontier of Christendom where there was inhabited land, Islam was dominant. Is it surprising that Islam came to be thought of as the great enemy?[32]

As far as influences on Carlyle are concerned, he finds Goethe the main dominant force.[33]

Carlyle, he argues,

> ... was the first writer in either East or West to attempt to fathom the inner experience of the founder of Islam.[34]

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29 Watt, The Faith and Practice, p. 14.
30 Hamidullah. See his review of the book, p. 64.
31 See 'Carlyle on Muhammad' in The Hibbert Journal (HJ) Vol. LII, (Oct. 1954 - July 1955), pp.247-254.
32 Ibid., p. 248.
33 Ibid., p. 252.
34 Ibid., p. 253.

The scholar adds that while most earlier researchers were interested in the historical record of Muḥammad,

> Carlyle alone was interested in the man, the human person, grappling with the problems of human life and destiny that are common to all men.[35]

Watt hence finds Carlyle's Muḥammad the true picture and sees his effort as

> ... an important step forward in the process of reversing the medieval world-picture of Islam as the great enemy, and rehabilitating its founder, Muḥammad.[36]

In 1953, a conference held in Liege and Spa in Belgium on 'Unity and Variety in Muslim Civilization' resulted in a book published under the same title in Chicago in 1955 and edited by Von Grunebaum. Watt published an article in 1956 based on this book and hence represents a reflection on the conference proceedings.[37]

He looks at the issue of whether Islam is monolithic, unity or multiplicity and explains that the answer, depending upon one's own influences, is not easy to find. He refers to a theory of Karl Marx in which it is asserted that people's opinions are influenced by their position in the social structure and points out that

> .. for example, in the case of Islamic Studies, ... racial, national and cultural allegiances[38]

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35 Ibid.

36 Ibid., p. 254.

37 'Thoughts on Islamic Unity' in IQ III No. 3, (Oct. 1956), pp. 188-195.

38 Ibid., p. 189.

are factors. Hence, he argues,

> ... whereas Marx thought that he and the proletariat were exempt from the distorting effect of material factors, nobody is immune from the 'taint of ideology'.[39]

Watt explains that this view does not necessarily question the scholarly aptitude of those concerned and the merit of their researches though. It merely states the position that at the end of the day, selection of material, interpretation of data and the evaluation of their acceptability or importance would have been due to particular orientations of a particular scholar.

The claim is very true to the issue discussed at the conference, Watt says. He gives the example of the differences between the perceptions of Islam in Africa by the French and British colonist. While the French were having the fear of a Pax-Islamica which would destroy the Union Francaise, the British, he insists, were more perceptive and hence saw Islam in its local context instead of being part of a world-wide movement.[40]

He is, however, of the view that a greater Unity of the Muslim world bears a healthier sign of peace both within the Muslim world and the world in general that it is normally thought. It is within this thought that he advocates a greater study of sociology and its application to Islam and religion in general. He believes this will reduce the tension existing between Western-educated Muslims and their 'traditional' religionists.[41]

The Reality of God[42] was one of the few works on Christian theology that Watt has produced.

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[39] Ibid.
[40] See Ibid., p. 191.
[41] Ibid., pp. 194-195.
[42] London: SPCK, 1957.

As the advertiser's blurb on the back cover indicates, this is an attempt to help primarily Christians, and of course, all men of faith to resolve the tensions which have been consequent to the clash of religious beliefs and scientific humanism. This book shows Watt's further lingering interest in philosophy because he writes with a philosophical methodology tempered by his Christian faith.

Again, it is indicative of Watt's concern for multi-faith approach to issues. Here, even though he writes basically as a Christian, he intimates that Muslims and Jews might be confronting the same enigma of scientific humanism in contemporary times. He hence writes:

> It may therefore be that, though writing chiefly for my fellow Christians,
> I shall say something of value for members of other religions.[43]

Further, Watt states his position clearly thus allowing the reader to follow him through the work as he does with practically all he writes. He states:

> What I am attempting ... in this book is to contribute to the relieving of this tension in our lives by stating the Christian conception of God in terms and thought forms which we use in the world of scientific humanism.
> ... I am restating what is already known and believed, but not revising it. I am translating it from the language of the New Testament and Christian Theology into that of scientific humanism or, more vaguely, modern thought; but a translation can never supplant the original. As befits a translator, I have no intention of saying nothing at variance with the ecumenical creeds of Christendom, which I fully accept.[44]

Watt further shares his positive attitude to Inter-Faith relations in his review of Constance Padwick's Muslim Devotions - A Study of Prayer Manuals in Common Use.[45] He emphasises that tremendous inter-religious contacts in our world today demand a shift in our attitude of

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43 Ibid., p. 2.
44 Ibid.
45 Published in London by SPCK, 1936.
See Watt's Review in HJ LIX, (Oct. 1960 - July 1961), pp. 385-386.

studying faiths other than ours. He points out that the change must be from the aloof, detached academic methods to a more pragmatic recognition that

> We and the members of the religions we study are in the same crowd, jostling one another at every turn; to continue to think in terms of an I/it relationship is no longer adequate.[46]

He sees the book's merits as hinging on the fact that it is a representation of real and ordinary Muslim's inner attitudes to his faith.

Even though he agrees that the work is entirely reflective of Muslim attitude, he finds an extraordinary resemblance to the concerns of ordinary Christians. He hence says:

> This makes one think.[47]

He concludes the review with a statement which is symptomatic of a man with deep respect for other people's faith. He writes:

> ... in this materialistic and atheistic world it is important that many more Christians should realize that, despite the recalcitrance of their genuine dogmatic differences from Islam, there is a spiritual blood-relationship between themselves and the Muslims.

He then asks

> Are not both spiritually, sometimes also physically, the seed of Abraham?[48]

Norman Daniel's epoch-making Islam and the West: The Making of an Image released in 1960 by the Edinburgh University Press was also reviewed by Watt.[49]

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46 Ibid., Watt's Review, pp. 385-386.
47 Ibid., p. 386.
48 Ibid.
49 in HJ LIX (Oct. 1960 - July 1961), pp. 209-212.

He sees the book in the light of the psychological theory these days of the positive effect of bringing back into one's consciousness the early experiences in life. He explains that Daniel's book takes one back to the 'war psychosis' era of Christian attitudes to Islam and points out that this is the best way to shake off the neurosis that seems to survive in the present era.

He describes the work as scholarly and a bold attempt which

> ... is a pioneer work in a field likely to be much cultivated in the coming decades, namely, the historical and psychological roots of communal images and attitudes.[50]

His concluding opinion is that the book would have a Carthatic effect on the Western mind-set. His book on Islamic Philosophy and Theology appeared in 1962.[51]

This was the first in the 'Islamic Surveys' series

> ... designed to give the educated reader something more than can be found in the usual popular books. Each work undertakes to survey a special part of the field, and to show the present stage of scholarship here.[52]

Watt was the first general editor of the series and the first to contribute to it. He introduces the book by discussing his sources explaining the problems that a scholar who deals with Arabic philosophical manuscripts faces. He points out that these might lead to a serious misrepresentation of facts and hence render the whole effort fruitless.

A specific mention is made of the myriads of interpretations open to a naive researcher handling manuscripts without the diacritical marks. He advises that astuteness in following the story is very crucial in order not to be misled and lend oneself to censure.

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50 Ibid., p.212.
51 Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1962.
52 Ibid., p.v.

Watt accedes to the fact that this work might be criticised on the same lines. He spends considerable time on his various sources both primary and secondary giving the reader an insight into the quality of the main book.

In the paperback edition published in 1985, comments on both the front and back covers are instructive. On the back cover, one reads:

> The product of a lifetime of study by one of the leading Islamists of our time, Watt's book represents an important contribution to the study of Islamic thought. It is clearly the best introduction to the subject presently available in English and will prove to be a valuable asset to both scholars and general readers interested in the history of Islamic thought. Highly recommended for graduate, undergraduate and public libraries.

In 1964 he published a paper devoted to the study of the nature of the Muslim community and the requirements for entering into that fold.[53] His main thesis in the paper is that Islam is a communalistic religion which hardly allows room for individualistic attitudes to thrive.

Looking at institutions like zakāh and salah Watt reasons that these essential characteristics of a believer or follower of Muḥammad show deep sense of communal feeling in Islam.

Referring to the Khawārij argument on the *Kabāir* sins, he argues that the main reason why such a person faces excommunication is because of the effect of his sins on the community as a whole hence endangering their status as people of paradise (*ahl al-jannah*).[54] His conclusion is that:

> ... there is more communalistic thinking in Islam than is usually realized.[55]

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53 'Conditions of Membership of the Islamic Community', in Studia Islamica (SI) Vol. XXI, (1964), pp.5-12.

54 See Ibid., pp. 6-7.

55 Ibid., p.12.

The scholar's Companion to the Qur'ān Based on Arberry's Translation[56] was his next major publication. The book is meant to be a handbook of explanation, albeit sketchy, of the Qur'ānic text to the uninitiated English reader.

As he himself says in the introduction:

> The aim of the present Companion is to provide the English reader with the chief background material needed to facilitate the understanding and appreciation of the Qur'ān in translation.[57]

Watt, emphasising the richness of the Arabic language in a way also acknowledges the inadequacy of the English tongue and hence the immense difficulty faced by a translator of the Qur'ān.[58]

Probably, the most problematic part of appreciating the Qur'ān is that of interpretation. Watt refers to this but makes a comment which might look a bit objectionable to Muslims. With regard to particular references as explained in the science of Asbāb al-Nuzūl, he accuses Muslim scholars of making dubious conjectures in their explanations.

Looking at the interpretation he puts on the last verse of Sūrah al-Fātiḥah, one could understand his anxiety with some of the classical (traditional) expositions. He writes that traditionally, the verse refers to

> ... Jews and Christians respectively ... but this is not possible if the Sura is early Meccan, while the phrases would suit the pagan Arabs.[59]

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56 London: George Allen & Unwin, 1967.

57 Ibid., p. 10.

58 T.B. Irving has delineated this problem in an article entitled: "Terms and Concepts - Problems in Translating the Qur'ān" in Aḥmad, K and Ansari, Z.I. (eds.), Islamic Perspectives - Studies in Honour of Mawlānā Abul'A'la Mawdūdī, (Leceister: The Islamic Foundation, 1979), pp. 121-134.

59 Watt, Companion, p.14.

In general, however, Watt seems to steer clear of deep controversies in his book often making casual reference to what Muslims themselves believe.

Watt's interest in the Qur'ān develops further and this is evident in his analysis of the Qur'ānic critique on Christian doctrines as it appears in the article he published in 1967.[60]

The main objective of the paper is to examine the Qur'ānic criticisms of Christianity and to find out whether these were directed against mainstream Christianity or some heretical groups. Referring to Waraqah and Negus and their apparent friendliness or sympathy for Muḥammad, Watt claims that Qur'ānic ideas became revised so that critiques which were earlier known to be directed at Jews now came to be applied to Christians.

He insists that the Qur'ānic understanding of the Christian doctrine of Trinity is at best described as 'Tritheism' which Christians vigorously deny.[61]

Even in the specific Qur'ānic reference to the Christian doctrine of the sonship of Jesus, as seen in Sūrah al-Taubah (9:30), Watt maintains that:

> ... this was not intended as an attack on the Orthodox Christian conception of the sonship of Christ, but on something else.[62]

On the Qur'ānic claim that Jesus was not killed on the Cross but it was made to appear like it to the people, (Sūrah al-Nisā' 4:157-158), Watt interprets it in a unique way. He writes:

> Once again, the primary denial is of something heretical, namely, the Jewish contention that the crucifixion had been a victory for them, and this same denial would of course be most vigorously affirmed by Christian Orthodoxy.[63]

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60 'The Christianity Criticized in the Qur'ān' in MW LVII No. 3 (July 1967), pp. 197-201.
61 Ibid., p. 198.
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid., p. 200.

The conclusion he makes is that rather than attacking primary Christian Orthodoxy, the Qur'ān is championing its cause in the face of heresy and Jewish invectives.

In the same year, he expresses some ideas in Inter-faith relations which were of specific concern to him.[64]

He says that the term dialogue presupposes a group of academics who reflect on pure intellectual issues and he does not see much hope in that exercise. He advocates instead what he terms "Inter-religion" which reflects a living dialogue rather than a mere intellectual reflection. He points out that opportunities afforded us by new scientific and technological development and argues that this should make us have more faith in inter-religion than ordinary dialogue.[65]

He further elaborates on the idea that Christian thoughts should be presented to Muslims and people of other religions through secular scientific arguments. He writes:

> ... we are called to seek involvement in contemporary secular thought as a response not merely to the internal concerns and tensions of Occidental culture (in which Western Christendom is comprised) but also to the great new fact of our century, namely, our condition of 'inter-religion'.[66]

In 1968, his work on a sociological and psychological outlook on religious truth came out.[67] In it , again, Watt begins with a layout of his objectives and methodology explaining all his

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64 See his 'Thoughts on Muslim-Christian Dialogue' in MW LVII (January 1967), No. 1, pp. 19-23.

65 Ibid., p. 19.

66 Ibid., p. 23.

67 Truth in the Religions - A Sociological and Psychological Approach, (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1968).

presumptions underpinning the study. His multi-faith interests are again evident here. He states that:

> I have attempted to defend religion in general and not Christianity specifically, since I think that in the present world situation the great religions whether they realize it or not, are allies against opposing forces.[68]

Discussing the problems and presuppositions, he touches on prejudice going back to the period when opinions about Islam were shaped by the

> ... 'War propaganda' of medieval times.[69]

He criticises Western scholars who see Divine Truth as found only in Christianity.

In his last chapter, Watt discusses approaches to religious harmony especially among the Abrahamic faiths. He brings back the argument of Inter-religion stressing that there is a global contact of all religious communities.

In the ensuing reasoning, however, he expresses apprehension that even though the inevitable existential contacts are positive signs, these in themselves might generate a struggle for supremacy. He therefore proposes a four point maxim which would enhance the harmony. He states clearly that the maxims do not preclude missionary work but what it rejects is its abuse in the form of proselytization.

The definition of proselytization is offered as

> ... seeking to get people to attach themselves to your community, chiefly because you want to glorify the community and not out of genuine concern for the welfare of the people themselves.[70]

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68 Ibid., p. vii.
69 Ibid., p. 1.
70 Ibid., p.173.

He explains further that his approach denounces the 'superiority complex' attitude where others are seen as clinging to an inferior system and therefore need to abandon it. The method he proposes means, as he says, that

> Any genuine mission in future must more and more be a mutual personal relationship in which we are ready to receive as well as to give. It is a case of letting the other person see in us the 'fruits' of our religion, while learning to appreciate in him the 'fruits' of his.[71]

Watt insists in his conclusions that world peace, and indeed unity, could only be attained with religion as the basis. All other forms of foundations be they economic, political or cultural are skirting the real problem, he argues.

The subject of the next book was Islamic Political Thought and this came out on the heels of the work on the socio-psychological study of truth in the religions.[72] The comments in the inside jacket of this book is instructive. They reiterate the religious foundations of political consciousness in Islam. Hence, it is said:

> Any fruitful understanding of the polities of Islam must be based on knowledge of these religious attitudes and comprehension of the historical processes by which they continue to influence both the body politic and the wider life of society.

Watt sets out to explain Islamic polity and its development based on the politico-religious formation structured by the prophet and his successors.

The book is the sixth in the Islamic Survey series which was basically meant as a special addition to ordinary material on the market on Islam.

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71 Ibid.

72 Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1968.

In the introduction, the author argues of the need for the close affinity between religion and politics. He elucidates:

> When politics becomes serious and it is a question men being ready to die for the cause they support, there has to be some deep driving force in their lives. Usually this force can only be supplied by a religion, or by an ideology that is acquiring some of the functions of religion (such as making man aware of the powers on which his life is dependant).[73]

Yet again, Watt makes his position clear emphasising that his primary concern would be the political processes in the history of Islam making allusions to the religious underpinnings. However, he makes it clear that the book

> ... will attempt to preserve the neutrality proper to the Social Scientist; that is to say, it will neither affirm nor deny the metaphysical truth of the religious ideas, but will consider them as ideas influencing the life of society.[74]

A.L. Tibāwī, in his review of the book begins extolling the qualities of Watt's writings. Even though he has misgivings with certain aspects of the book's style, he nevertheless says of Watt that

> His writing is clear, logical and sparkles with inventive comments.[75]

1968 is perhaps one of the richest periods in Watt's academic life. A third book came out entitled What is Islam?[76] This was part of the Arab Background Series under the general editorship of Nicolas A. Ziadeh then of the American University of Beirut. In his preface to this work, Ziadeh explains that the series were meant to educate the English-speaking populace

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73 Ibid., p. ix.

74 Ibid., p. x.

75 See Review of the book in IQ xiv No. 1 (January - March 1970) (pp. 53-54), p. 53.

76 What is Islam? (London & Harrow: Longmans, Green & Co., 1968 and also Beirut, Librarie du Liban, 1968).

on the role of Islam as the guiding principle of the Arab world, a subject he argues, the world could no longer do without. He points out that it was the intensity of Islam which fired the Arabs to contribute so much to world civilization and hence enabled a rather hitherto obscure nation to become a world power. The contributors to the series are all experts in their various areas.

In the Introduction, Watt looks at Thomas Carlyle's public lecture on 8th. May 1840 in Edinburgh in which perhaps for the first time, a Westerner pronounced Muḥammad a sincere man with an open earnest soul. Still, Watt argues, Carlyle had one basic hurdle to overcome, a hurdle which has faced and possibly continue to plague European scholarly circles. The main obstacle, he maintains, is the

> ... deep-seated prejudice which goes back to the 'war propaganda' of medieval times.[77]

The spiritual and military scare that Islam created was enormous and hence it was instantly seen as the greatest enemy to Christendom. Therefore,

> In deadly fear Christendom had to bolster confidence by placing the enemy in the most unfavourable light possible, consistent with some genuine basis in fact. The image created in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries continued to dominate European thinking about Islam, and even in the second half of the twentieth century has some vestigial influence.[78]

Watt examines the problem of definition of religion in the West as compared to the Islamic concept 'dīn' explaining that to the average Western Christian, religion might not go beyond the basic needs of an individual in his day to day life in the community. Certainly, it

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77 Ibid., p.1.
78 Ibid., p.2.

would have nothing to do with commerce, or economics or whatever one might see as a general hygiene and etiquette.

To a Muslim, however, *'dīn'* (usually rendered 'religion') encompasses all these and even more. This, Watt points out, makes it difficult for the ordinary Western Christian to appreciate what the average Muslim is talking about as his reason. Watt's book claims to seek to bridge the gap between the two; to create a sociological understanding of religion which has some affinity with the Durkhiemian notion. This understanding affirms the importance of the deep-seated social function of religion.

In his opening chapter, Watt focuses on the nature of the vision that Muḥammad had, seeing it as a new irruption with its own distinctiveness yet, at the same time following the general trend of scriptural history. He virtually dismisses the favourite theory of the literary and historical dependence of the Qur'ān on existing ideas and the milieu of the then Arabia and the world. He emphasis that

> ... studies of sources and origins satisfy our intellectual curiosity and show us something of the mechanisms which play a subordinate part in literary creativity, but the essential creative work of genius eludes such studies.[79]

Watt advises against this almost idee fixe in many scholars consciousness that Islam is merely a garbled form of previously established monotheistic systems of thought be it Christianity or Judaism. He invites people to note the

> particularity of the Islamic vision

citing Tor Andrae who went as far as saying that Muḥammad's image of God does not indicate any influence from Judaism or Christianity.[80]

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79 Ibid., p. 12.
80 See Tor Andrae, Moḥammed, p. 86.

Watt's argument continues that whatever the natural effect of the contemporary environment on Muḥammad,

> ... this would not prevent the distinctive Qur'anic teaching from being a fresh irruption, any more than Jesus' appreciation of contemporary Jewish religion reduced his originality.[81]

He hence leaves room for acceptance of the Qur'ān as embodying a large measure of truth. However, he writes:

> At the same time we cannot fully accept the standard Islamic view that the Qur'ān is wholly true and the criterion of all other truth; for in the strictly historical field, we cannot hold that the Qur'ān override the usual canons of historical evidence.[82]

In the concluding chapter, Watt looks at Islamic values in the contemporary world. He examines the Muslim perception of Muḥammad as the archetype, the paradigmatic embodiment par excellence and in some ways questions the historicity of many of the traditions.

He acknowledges, nevertheless, that

> So much moral abuse has been hurled at Muhammad in Europe over many centuries that it is difficult if not impossible, for any Occidental to think of him as a moral exemplar.[83]

He is of the view, not entirely different from the general Western perception of the traditions of Islam, that a large proportion of the accounts about Muḥammad's life consists of projections of Muslims. He argues that since

> ... projection is a justifiable epistemological procedure in theological matters ...

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81 Watt, Islam, p. 17.
82 Ibid., p. 21.
83 Ibid., p. 228.

these 'idealistic expectations" by Muslims of Muḥammad are not entirely devoid of historical authenticity. He offers an analogy of a novelist whose imaginary creations might have the capacity of conveying truth because they are embodied in some reality.

In a statement which Muslim readers might find it a bit difficult to grapple with, he says that

> Some Muslims must have put these stories into circulation, and, if challenged, would have presumably have said, 'This is the way one would have expected Muhammad to have acted.[84]

In his concluding paragraph, Watt looks back at his analysis of the question he raised by the very title What is Islam? and reassures himself that he has done justice to it more or less appealing to both Muslims and non-Muslims to acknowledge his efforts.

He writes:

> It is my hope that this book will enable Occidentals to understand better this living and powerful community which is both their partner and their rival, and also that it will show Muslims how a sympathetic Occidental sees them and thus bring them to appreciate another facet of their own identity.[85]

One of the most significant issues that Watt raises is the methodological problem as to how an Occidental or anyone who is not a Muslim can study Islam adequately. Does he have to be 'kind' or 'sympathetic' or satisfy other criteria outside those in strict academic scholarship? We might be able to pick on this issue in the concluding part of this thesis.

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84 Ibid., p. 229.

85 Ibid., p. 234.

Khurram Murād's review of this book reverently acknowledges Watt's expertise but the general conclusion is that the book is

> ... to say the least, disappointing. Islam could perhaps have done without such help in making it comprehensible to the West.[86]

To A.S. Bazmee Anṣārī, who must have read Khurram Murād's review,

> Strictly speaking the book ... does not describe Islam as a religious system but only attempts to give a philosophical and sociological and to some extent historical explanation of what, according to the author, may be called religion.[87]

Despite his very critical review the latter reviewer shares the thoughts and concern of Watt for the destructive effects that colonialism has had on Muslim polity and his hopes that the original and undiluted Islamic vision would direct the contemporary Muslims to build the Islamic society which was envisioned but also drawing on Occidental values which are compatible.[88]

His revised edition of Bell's work on the Qur'ān Bell's Introduction to the Qur'ān was published in 1970[89]

Despite and curiously enough due to profound respect for his teacher, Bell, Watt expresses his opinions frankly which, again, is indicative of his academic integrity.[90]

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86 in MWBR Vol. 1, No. 3 (Spring 1981), (pp. 3-6), p. 5.

87 See his review in HI Vol. IV No. 3, (Autumn 1981) (pp. 91-97), p. 91.
Bazmee Anṣārī uses almost the same wording in his appreciation of Watt as a scholar in his opening paragraph as that of Khurram Murād in Page 5 of his (the latter's) review.

88 See Watt, Islam, pp. 168-169, 233 and Bazmee Ansari's review, pp. 96-97.

89 Published in Edinburgh at the Edinburgh University Press (paperback edition, 1977; reprinted 1990).
We have mentioned this work in the Section of twentieth Century literature; see 4.1.1. esp. footnote 55.

90 Watt says that
"The sincerest tribute to such a scholar is to take his views serioulsy and criticise them frankly".
See p. v of the book.

He questions Bell's view that the Qur'ān is the work of Muḥammad and explains that:

> With the greatly increased contacts between Muslims and Christians during the last quarter of a century, it has become imperative for a Christian scholar not to offend Muslim readers gratuitously, but as far as possible present his arguments in a form acceptable to them.[91]

Watt explains to his reader the paramount place of the Qur'ān in Muslim piety and ordinary day to day life emphasising that such a book which moulds the life and thought forms of a large segment of the world's population obviously merits attention.

He advises against the attitude of nineteenth century Occidental scholarship where scholars pontificated about Islam and other religions. He recommends a reverential approach to the Qur'ān in particular even though one might not share its reasoning. This is the foundation for his critique of Bell's work.

In the second chapter entitled "Muḥammad's prophetic Experience" the scholar reminds us of the criticisms of the early Christian scholars' of Muḥammad's vocation. He writes:

> In Medieval Europe there was elaborated the conception of Muhammad as a false prophet, who merely pretended to receive messages from God; and this and other falsifications of Medieval war propaganda are only slowly being expunged from the mind of Europe and of Christendom.[92]

He catalogues a series of scholars and their basic ideas; some of them attempting to present a more balanced view of Muḥammad and Islam while others merely continued wallowing in the Medieval derision.

While mentioning Thomas Carlyle, Frants Buhl, Richard Bell and Tor Andrae as examples of those who tried to rescue Muḥammad, he lists Gustav Weil, Aloys Sprenger,

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91 Watt, Bell's Introduction, p.vi.
This, further, brings to the fore the methodological conundrum as to how one scholarl studies a faith he does not share.

92 Ibid. p. 17.

William Muir, David S. Margoliouth and Theodore Noldeke as typical of those who had vestiges of the 'war-propaganda views' surviving in their works.[93]

He criticises such approaches, especially those of the latter group, as depending too much on certain traditions which might not have any certainty instead of the Qur'ān the veracity of which could be relied upon. He states:

> It is incredible that a person subject to epilepsy or hysteria or even ungovernable fits of emotion, could have been the active leader of military expeditions, or the cool far-seeing guide of a city-state and a growing religious community; but all this we know Muhammad to have been. In such questions the principle of the historian should be to depend mainly on the Qur'ān and to accept tradition only in so far as it is in harmony with the result of Qur'ānic study.[94]

Watt's opinion here is in consonance with hadīth scholarship itself where one of the underlying principles is that if a '*ḥadīth* contradicts an express Qur'ānic principle then that statement is basically rejected as unauthentic.[95]

Watt advocates a repudiation of the Medieval opinionated conceptions and acceptance of Muḥammad

> ... as a man who sincerely and in good faith proclaimed messages which he believed came to him from God.[96]

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93 Ibid., pp. 17-18.

94 Ibid.

95 See:
Azamī, M.M., Studies in HadīthMethodology and Literature, (Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1977)
--------. On Schacht's Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence, (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1993)
Kamālī, M.H., Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence, Revised Ed., (Cambridge, The Islamic Texts Society, 1991)
Siddīqi, M.Z., Hadīth Literature - Its Origin, Development and Special Features, (Calcutta: Calcutta University Press, 1961)
Juynboll, G.H.A., The Authenticity of the Tradition Literature, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1969)
--------. Muslim Tradition - Studies in Chronology, Provenance and authorship of early Hadith, (Cambridge etc.: Cambridge University Press, 1983)
Yūsuf, S.M., An Essay on the Sunnah- Its importance, transmission, development and revision, (Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1980).

In 1979, Watt turned his attention to Islam and Europe and wrote the The Influence of Islam on Medieval Europe which appeared as the ninth in the Islamic Surveys series.[97] The book came as a result of Watt's visiting professorship at the College de France in 1970.

In his opening chapter, the scholar decries the lack of European scholarly writings on the influence of Islam on Europe and hence its contribution to the flowering of European Civilization. The main objective of the book is hence to offer

> ... a comprehensive view of this influence ...[98]

He points out that as far as Islamic Cultural indebtedness is concerned,

> ... we Europeans have a blind spot. We sometimes belittle the extent and importance of Islamic influence in our heritage, and sometimes overlook it altogether.[99]

Watt hence looks at Commerce and Technology, Arab advances in science and philosophy and how these have impacted Europe. He again reminds his readers of the

> ... way in which a distorted image of Islam has dominated thinking in Europe from the twelfth century almost until the present day.[100]

J. D. Latham reviews this book[101] and offers the reader a glimpse of Watt's place in the circle of those who struggle to have some form of objective study of Islam and indeed any other faith they do not profess themselves.

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96 Watt, Bell's Introduction, p. 18.
See also his discussions on "The Qur'ān and Occidental Scholarship" in Chapt. 11, pp. 173-186. He again raises the problem of methodology.

97 Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1972. Reprinted in 1982, 1987 and 1994.

98 Ibid., p.1.

99 Ibid., p. 2.

100 Ibid., p. 72.

101 in IQ XVII No. 3 & 4, (July-Dec. 1973), pp. 191-192.

Latham writes:

> The most refreshing feature of this book is that the author - a committed Christian - approaches his subject as free from prejudice, whether conscious or subconscious, against Islam as it is possible to be.[102]

He commends Watt for making a serious attempt to study Islam from a new perspective.[103]

Watt has been able to carve an enviable place in the area of Sīrah in English scholarship. This opinion is attested to by the invitation granted him to deliver a paper at the "First International Congress on Seerat" held in Islamabad under the auspices of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Pakistan and the Hamdard National Foundation in March 1976.[104]

In the full text, Watt introduces his paper by looking at the basic issue of common concern for both Christians and Muslims which he identifies as "*Kufr*" or 'atheism' or materialism and hence the pressing need for dialogue. He explains that one fundamental demand for a proper atmosphere for dialogue is the preparedness to listen and learn from each other. He mentions people like Massignon and Arberry as among those who bravely took up the study of Islam seriously and were enriched thereby.[105]

He goes on to discuss the twelfth and thirteenth century Christian defensive study of Islam and the resultant distortion. He however points out the process of change which started in the seventeenth century mentioning names like Leibniz, Goethe and Carlyle who, in their various approaches had a positive appreciation of Islam.

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102 Ibid., p. 191.

103 Ibid.

104 See 'Secular Historians and the Study of Muḥammad' in HI Vol. 1 No. 3, (1978), pp. 51-53. Also see the full text of the paper published as: "Western Historical scholarship and the Prophet of Islam" in Message of the Prophet, a selection of articles read at the First International Congress on Seerat, Islamabad, 1976, pp. 68-75.

105 See the full text 'Western Historical Scholarship', pp. 68-69.

He asserts that the

> ... hostility was due to personal attitudes of the writers and not to scientific historical methods. On the contrary, it will be maintained, these methods are essentially neutral to Islam, Christianity and other religion.[106]

In his conclusion, he expresses the wish that Muslims would take scientific historical study of the Sīrah seriously. He points out that even though there will definitely be hostility it is only this method which will enable the researcher's perseverance to yield the required fruit, that of reaching to the truth. By this, one would enormously contribute to the understanding of Islam among those who do not share the faith.

In 1983, Watt published an article on "A Muslim Account of Christian Doctrine"[107] in which he looks at the work of al-Shahrastānī Kitāb al-Milal wa 'l-Nihal. He finds the study of al-Shahrastānī of the three main Christian sects generally

> ... objective and, so far as it went, reliable.[108]

Watt translates the study giving elaborate comments in the footnotes which appreciates the presentation on the Christian Trinitarian and Christological doctrine.

It was in the same year that the scholar's other book Islam and Christianity Today - A Contribution to Dialogue appeared.[109] The book looks at the whole subject of scholars studying 'other' religions and seeks avenues for positive dialogue. Watt takes this book as a project which is a culmination of his own personal 'inner dialogue' since he considers the study of a religion other than one's own a dialogue in itself.[110]

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106 Ibid., p. 72.

107 in HI Vol. VI No. 2 (Summer 1983), pp. 57-68.
cf. his 'The Christianity criticised in The Qurān' in MW LVII No. 3, (July 1967), pp. 197-201.

108 Ibid., p. 57.

109 London etc.: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983.
See initial mention of this work in the section on 'The Choice of Watt' supra.

110 Ibid., preface, p. xiii.

He sets out the concern of the work as

> ... the doctrinal aspects of the meeting of the two religions, and hardly anything has been said about ethical or other aspects. Ethical aspects, in particular, are so complex that they would require a book to themselves.[111]

He examines the traditional approaches and attitudes by both Christians and Muslims to each other and makes an interesting conclusion which seems to be quite objective. He writes:

> The 'distorted image', however, has continued to influence the Western understanding of Islam into the present century, despite the efforts of scholars for two hundred years or more to correct the flagrant distortions. Just as their efforts appeared to be successful certain events linked with the present revival of Islam are causing not a few Westerners to turn back to the 'distorted image'.[112]

This, hence, makes dialogue which he considers, despite all its inherent scepticism and possibly dangers, as mutual witnessing, to be imperative. He counts himself among the advocates of reconstruction of the 'defences' erected over the ages due to the old thinking and more or less asks for a 'quantum leap' to be made on both sides.

In his conclusion, he insists that every believer in God owes it as a duty to his Creator, to himself and to his community to strive and attain a better understanding of people of other faiths.

He does not share the fears that dialogue leads to amalgamation of faiths pointing out that it rather involves a

> ... mutual recognition where the various world religions accept one another as fellow-climbers of the cloud-covered mountain on whose summit in the mists God dwells unseen.[113]

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111 Ibid.
112 Ibid., p. 4.
113 Ibid., p. 146.

In an extensive review article, ᶜAlī Qūli Qarā'ī looks at the book critically.[114] Acknowledging what he sees as Watt's positive posture towards Islam, and in fact all religions, al-Qarā'ī detects a dual effort in the author's writing. He finds that Watt's 'inner dialogue' has been prompted by the need to defend his own faith against the continuous growth of scientism and by defending Christianity, he would be defending aspects of Islamic beliefs as well.

The reviewer again finds in Watt a pragmatic approach which defends religious pluralism and the axiology of religious faith in general.[115] He cites Watt's own argument that religion over the course of history has offered man a quality of life that is largely satisfactory[116] but questions the assertion. His questions have to do with the criteria Watt employs to judge the quality of life as satisfactory and whether that on its own ensures salvation.[117]

Al-Qarā'ī takes issue with Watt's contention that the two most contentious issues between Islam and Christianity which are the prophethood of Muḥammad and the incarnation of Jesus are not that divergent when closely examined.[118]

To al-Qarā'ī, the author's attempt to explain the complication through symbolic language could be seen as a demand that Muslims are to accept the divinity of Jesus in exchange for Christians accepting the authenticity of Muḥammad's prophethood.[119]

He accuses Watt of naiveté in his interpretation of religious doctrines and of deep infatuation

> ... with the desire to defend the Christian doctrines by diluting Islamic disapproval of them.[120]

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114 in Al-Tawḥīd Vol. II No. 3 (April-June 1985) Rajab-Ramadan 1405, pp. 136-176.
115 Ibid., p. 137.
116 Watt, Islam and Christianity, see pp. 21-22.
117 al-Qarā'ī's review, p. 137.
118 See Watt, Islam and Christianity, pp. 23-31.
119 al-Qarā'ī's review, p. 138.
120 Ibid., p. 171.

The central issue in this reaction derives from Watt's insistence that the Crucifixion of Jesus is a historical fact beyond doubt and it is as irrefutable as saying that

> ... Muḥammad proclaimed the religion of Islam in Mecca about the year 610 ...[121]

Al-Qarāʾī dismisses the views of the secular historian as mere conjectures which are based on empirical world-view which do not necessarily mean certainty. To him, Watt follows other orientalists in using such conjectures and sophistry in their analysis of Islam.[122]

Watt's book is also reviewed at length by Zāhid Azīz who describes Watt as a most distinguished Western scholar of Islam. [123] He however expresses surprise that with all his knowledge, Watt completely omitted the Islamic view of Inter-faith dialogue. Like al-Qara'i, Azīz is of the view that

> ... Watt's concept of 'dialogue' appears to be not much more than Muslims being asked to alter the interpretation of those Qur'anic verses which militate against Christian beliefs.[124]

He also attacks Watt's demand that Muslims should reinterpret the Qur'ānic verses on the alleged corruption of the Biblical text to mean either 'limited' or 'temporary' corruption while Christians are to change some of their medieval views about Islam. Azīz points out that such a suggestion

> ... is clearly a retrograde step so far as modern research and knowledge are concerned.[125]

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121 Watt, Islam and Christianity, p. 144.
122 al-Qarāʾī's review p. 176 Note 11.
123 in The Islamic Guardian Vol. V No. 2 (April-June, 1984), pp. 18-28.
124 Ibid., p. 19.
125 Ibid., p. 21.
cf. Watt, Islam and Christianity, p. 3.

Watt in his discussions on the charge of scriptural corruption levelled against Christians by Muslims, calls the charge part of the Muslim efforts to promote the self-image of Islam by emphasising its ṣelf-sufficiency. He then refers to a story in which the Khalīfah 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb was said to have ordered the burning down of the Alexandrian library after the city fell to the Muslim army. 'Umar was supposed to have said rather cynically that if the books in the library did not contradict the teachings of the Qur'ān then they were an unnecessary duplication and hence should be destroyed. Again, if they contradicted the Qur'ānic teachings then they should be destroyed as well since they constituted a danger to truth.

Watt himself expresses scepticism about the story but the mere fact that he recounts it has immense implications. He says

> This story is probably not factually true, but it expresses exactly a belief still common among Muslims, namely, that all the religious and moral guidance required by the human race, from now to the end of time is to be found in the Qur'ān (coupled with the example of Muḥammad).[126]

He then attempts to assign reason to this perceived notion among Muslims which he thinks

> ... may go back to the feeling of the nomadic Arab that he was superior to all peasants and city-dwellers and had nothing to learn from them.[127]

Azīz, in his review, takes this issue of 'Umar's story very seriously and accuses Watt of presenting

> ... a totally false story fabricated centuries ago to discredit Islam,... and proceeds to draw a conclusion from it about Muslim beliefs ...[128]

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126 Watt, Islam and Christianity, p. 3.
127 Ibid.
128 Azīz's review of Watt's Islam and Christianity, p. 21.

He expresses his displeasure with this kind of academic scholarship in which weight is attached to a false story and deductions made. The fact that Watt himself expresses some scepticism should have been enough to omit the story altogether.

Aziz further detects a lacuna which he considers as significant taking into consideration the purported objective of the book. He points out that the book

> ... completely omits to give the history of the contact between the two faiths over the last hundred years or so, ...[129]

He is of the opinion that the lack of this important historical dimension in which vigorous missionary activities feature considerably has seriously undermined the value of the book. Thus the general view of Azīz regarding the book is that of dissatisfaction and the estimation of Watt in his own eyes also lowered.

In 1984, in the Studia Missionalia, Watt published an article on Muḥammad entitled 'Muḥammad as the founder of Islam'.[130] The paper opens with a discussion on the human element of the prophet as a linkage between God and man. He points out that in the drama of revelation

> ... there is a wide field for human co-operation with the divine initiative.[131]

He holds that the same is very true in the case of Muḥammad.

In his attempt to justify the use of the concept 'founding' of religion he goes on that since Muḥammad was instrumental in the establishment and management of the Muslim

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129 Ibid, p. 24.
130 Vol. 33, pp. 227-249.
131 Ibid., p 227.

Ummah especially in the post-*Hijrah* period in Madina then the epithet 'founder of Islam' is justified.[132]

Touching on the pre-Islamic milieu, Watt asserts that even though some sprinkling of monotheistic ideas from a handful of Jews and Christians

> ... the average Arab of Mecca, or indeed of Medina, seems to have had only slight and imperfect knowledge of the Jewish and Christian religions.[133]

He pictures Muḥammad as being in a dire search for a new monotheism which would have relevance for the problems of the Makkan society. In this search, Muḥammad's views of God are presented as being very fluid and within the context of the contemporary Jewish and to a lesser extent Christian views.

Making reference to the Qur'ānic narrative on Muhammad's sighting of the angel Jibrīl he asserts that Muḥammad thought he had seen God

> ... though later, when he learnt the Jewish view that God cannot be seen, he thought of this being as an angel.[134]

Touching on the dating of the revelations in terms of the *Sūrahs*, Watt acknowledges the enormity of the problem since, to him, the Muslim science of *asbāb al-Nuzūl* does not offer much help in this enterprise. Again, he points out that the 'unofficial' acceptance of these views in the *asbāb al-Nuzūl* by Muslims has prompted Western scholarly circles to devise their own critical criteria to arrive at a solution. This question of assigning dates for Qur'ānic passages has also been complicated further by the fact that a lot of similarities exist among them.

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132 Ibid., pp. 227-228.
133 Ibid., p. 230.
134 Ibid., p. 231.

Watt offers an advice as to the attitude in this whole exercise. He writes:

> In all this process sound scholarship requires that we hold Muḥammad to have believed sincerely that to God and not himself were due not only the original revelations but also the repetition of revelations with modifications and his putting together of revelations into suras.[135]

The issue of satanic verses is mentioned pointing out how the so-called repudiation of the alleged verses affect the prophet's image and that of his followers.

Watt then acknowledges how this story is subjected to serious discussion by Muslims and its renunciation. He however adds:

> ... it is difficult to understand how any Muslim could have invented or accepted it, if it had no basis in fact.[136]

With regard to the pacts of al-ʿAqabah which resulted in the *hijrah* to Madīna, Watt reasons that Muḥammad envisaged the opportunities of raids on Makkan caravans that Madīna offered and that is why he accepted the invitation to move.[137] Hence, the whole motive for the *hijrah* is being seriously questioned.

The argument from here is developed to interpret even the motive for the spread of Islam in general. Watt claims that

> The expeditions of the following century, however, which caused Muḥammad's federation to expand into an empire stretching from Spain and Morocco to Delhi and Samarqand, were really only glorified razzias, whose aim was not to make converts but to gain booty.[138]

The paper then looks at the attitude of Muḥammad towards Jews and Christians which Watt characterises with a transformation from amity to hostility. He suggests that the attitude

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135 Ibid., p. 232.
136 Ibid., p. 234.
137 Ibid., p. 238.
138 Ibid., p. 242.

worsened as more and more statements came through the revelation criticising certain Christian doctrines. In this, he again affirms as he has done in his work entitled Islam and Christianity - A Contribution to Dialogue,[139] that there is no semblance of what the Qur'ān criticises to Orthodox Christian doctrine but probably some heretical beliefs in existence in Makkah and Madīna in the days of Muḥammad.[140]

He attributes the change in the direction of prayer (*qiblah*) and the institution of the annual fast in the month of Ramaḍān also to the shift in the attitude of Muḥammad towards the Jews in particular and what he thinks were worsening relations between Muḥammad and people of other faiths. He hence discusses briefly the confrontations with the three main Jewish tribes in Madīna and considers the way the issues were handled as cruel.[141]

However, he points out that the 'cruelty' has to be seen within the proper historical period where

> ... there was much violence ...[142]

and hence asks that

> ... the modern historian, remembering the distortions of the medieval image, will tend to give Muhammad the benefit of the doubt.[143]

Watt calls for a complete rejection of the medieval-age charges of impostor and liar levelled against Muḥammad explaining the contemporary sound scholarship does not accept such frivolous charges anymore. Muḥammad's proven sincerity, he further insists, leaves no room to

139 vide supra.
140 'Muhammad as Founder', pp. 242-243.
141 Ibid., p. 243.
142 Ibid, p. 248.
143 Ibid., p. 249.

question the fact that Muḥammad was able to discriminate the revelation from his own unconscious activities.

In his winding up thoughts, Watt reiterates the underlying assumptions for the article regarding the status of Muḥammad. He writes

> This study has been based on the belief that Muḥammad was a genuine prophet in the sense that God used him to communicate truth about himself to human beings; but this assertion has to be qualified by holding also that prophets can make mistakes of a sort, as the Old Testament prophets Haggai and Zechariah did when they thought that Prince Zerubbabel was the Messiah.[144]

Noting Muḥammad as one used by God to found a religion he intimates that

> ... perhaps a part of his role in these purposes is to challenge Christians to more profound reflection on some of their basic beliefs.[145]

In 1985, another article of Watt appeared as a reaction to another written by one Farrukh B. ʿAlī. The article was entitled "The Expedition of al-Hudaybiya Reconsidered'.[146]

Farrukh asserts that the whole issue of al-Hudaybiyyah

> ... constitute a strange chapter in the history of Islam and the life of the prophet Muḥammad. The accepted version of these events and the terms of the treaty raise many questions and create many difficulties.[147]

His article hence questions the whole episode as understood in traditional literature finding it incompatible with the status of Muḥammad as a prophet with divine patronage.

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144 Ibid.

145 Ibid.

146 in HI Vol. VIII No. 1 (Spring 1985), pp. 3-6.
cf. Farrukh 'Alī's article entitled 'Al-Hudaybiya: an alternative version' in MW Vol. 71 No. (1981), pp.47-62.

147 'Al-Hudaybiya: an alternative version', p. 47.

To Farrukh, the Hudaibiyya episode is too humiliating to be true. By implication, the accepted version is just not rational enough. He insists that the terms of the treaty

> ... bear no logical relationship to the general situation prevailing in Arabia at the time, nor to the particular situation existing at Hudaybiya on that occasion. It appears unlikely that he could have agreed to such a treaty.[148]

Watt expresses his strong disagreement with the underlying rationale for Farrukh's paper maintaining that

> In the actions of the Prophet there was nothing dishonourable or cowardly and no neglect of principles.[149]

He explains that the episode rather offers a further exposition on the immense skills of the prophet as a master tactician. Again, he points out that even though a cursory look at the whole issue might present a picture of victory for the Makkans, a perceptive analysis shows a desperate Makkan attempt to boost their self-confidence. On the other hand, the composure of the Prophet and his people was indicative of immense self-confidence that victory was inevitable and those desperate attempts by the Makkans to stop them were signs to that effect.[150]

Farrukh asserts that the whole accepted version has been based on the *Ḥadīth* of Miswar b. Makhrama and Marwān b. al-Ḥakam some details of which are not found in the main text of the *Ḥadīth* when one compares it with the version in Ibn Isḥāq, al-Ṭabarī and al-Wāqidī. He is of the opinion that the details of the *ḥadīth* are ahistorical. He lays the blame at the door of the *quṣṣāṣ* (story-tellers) who used to embellish certain historical events.[151]

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148 Ibid., p. 48.
149 'Al-Hudaybiya Reconsidered', p.3.
150 Ibid., pp. 3-4.
151 'Al-Hudaybiya-an alternative version' see pp. 48-52.

Watt points out that Farrukh's reasoning is faulty because he

> ... fails to recognize that these developed a sharp distinction between the disciplines of Hadīth and Sīra, and between the methods employed.[152]

He explains that there were other means of obtaining details of expeditions especially the accounts of the people themselves which might have nothing to do with the *Ḥadīth*. These accounts were widespread enough in many cases to merit the status of *tawātur*.[153] He hence affirms his position thus:

> ... the standard account of the expedition of al-Hudaybiyya and what followed is not dependent on any Ḥadīth but is part of the 'widely transmitted' (mutawātir) and generally accepted chronological framework.[154]

Watt's interest in things Islamic is further evidence in his immense positive regard for al-Ghazzālī. Having already written on this great scholar, Watt, in 1986 published another article entitled 'A Great Muslim Mystic'.[155] Perhaps Watt is sharing in the general Western scholars fascination for al-Ghazzālī but it seems also that he has a general respect for Islamic spirituality and al-Ghazzālī symbolizes this for him.

This article is mentioned here merely to show Watt's interest in, and respect for Islam and it is not meant to be discussed since the gist does not fall directly within the domain of the present project.

Our attention now shifts onto the series entitled The History of al-Ṭabarī to which Watt contributed.

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152 'Al-Hudaybiya Reconsidered', p. 4.
153 Ibid., p. 5.
154 Ibid.
155 in Studia Missionalia, Vol. 35, (1986), pp. 161-178.

Watt teamed up with M.V. McDonald to work on the annotation and translation of volumes VI and VII in the series.[156] Even though the translation could offer us a glimpse of Watt's thought, perhaps it is fair to reason that a better insight could be obtained from the 'Translator's Foreword' both of which were written by Watt. Since the ideas here are presumably entirely his, looking at the foreword should probably serve the objective of understanding him.[157]

In the seventh volume which incidentally appeared earlier (1987) than the sixth (1988), Watt begins the foreword with a note that the period under discussion

> ... was a time of critical importance both for Islam as a religion and for the political community in which it was embodied.[158]

He touches on the Constitution of Madīna and what he assumes was apparent lack of any special political authority in Muḥammad.

He asserts that the selection of Friday as a special day for the Muslims was made by Muḥammad on the principle of expedience. He says that this was a market day in Madīna and it was also the day that the Jews use to prepare for the Sabbath and hence since it was already part of the customary practice, Muḥammad accepted it as such.[159]

On the marriages of the prophet, Watt claims that all of them

> ...and those he arranged for his daughters were made for political reasons.[160]

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156 See: The History of al-Ṭabarī (Ta'rīkh al-rusul wa'l mulūk) Vol. VII. The Foundation of the Community, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987) and The History of al-Ṭabarī (Ta'rīkh al-rusul wa'l Mulūk) Vol. VI Muhammad at Mecca, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988).

157 In fact, he himself points out that the main translation was done by M.V. McDonald while he wrote the introduction and the annotation. See Ibid. Vol. VII, p. xxxviii.

158 Ibid., p. xv.

159 Ibid., p. xvi.

160 Ibid., p.xviii.

On 'Āishah and her personal qualities as traditionally expounded in Muslim literature, Watt is of the opinion that the extolment had a political undertone directed against the Shi'ites who were immoderate in their praises for Fāṭimah.[161] This seems to suggest that 'Āishah did not merit those qualities usually attributed to her but these are meant to serve a political purpose.

Watt looks at the early expeditions undertaken by Muḥammad and his companions and expresses surprise in al-Ṭabarī's arrangement as compared to those of al-Wāqidī and Ibn Isḥāq. With respect to dating he has more confidence in al-Wāqidī's because they make things clearer than al-Ṭabarī's.[162]

This attitude of Watt regarding concern for finer details is symptomatic of a seasoned historian.

Watt's comments on the battle of Badr and tries to assign reasons for the spectacular victory of the Muslims. After mentioning the military tactic of the Muslims in occupying the main wells in the area he says

> It is likely, too, that the Anṣār, because they gained a livelihood by cultivating date-palm and cereal crops, were in better condition physically than the Meccans, whose lives as merchants were probably much more sedentary.[163]

Of course, despite the ingenuity of this opinion, Watt recognizes that their belief in a supernatural backing and their expectation to be rewarded with Paradise heightened their morale.[164]

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161 Ibid.
162 Ibid., see pp. xxi-xxiv.
163 Ibid., p.xxvi.
164 Ibid.

Watt's further comments draw the reader's attention to the relationship with the Jews pointing out that

> One of the limitations of al-Ṭabarī's method of writing history is to be seen in the fact that he more or less attaches less importance to the Jewish question.[165]

Watt explains that even though it could be argued that Muḥammad and his followers had a marked interest in the wealth of the Jews, the primary grounds for the expulsion of the Jews from Medīna was that they became a real danger to the very basis of the new religio-political arrangement.[166]

At least, in this particular instance, Watt shifts from his usual reasoning where economic considerations were primary to any decision taken by the prophet.[167]

In his concluding remarks, Watt looks at the sources of al-Ṭabarī making reference to omissions from his main source - the Sīrah of Ibn Isḥāq as seen in the recension of Ibn Hishām and also additions from al-Wāqidī's accounts.

The sixth volume which curiously appeared in 1988 after the seventh focuses on the Makkan situation.

Again, characteristically the scholar analyses the sources that were at the disposal of al-Ṭabarī in his time. He further notes that Ibn Isḥāq remains the dominant influence[168]

In addition, al-Ṭabarī is noted as a scholar who balances the accounts he picks from Ibn Isḥāq either through Ibn Hishām or elsewhere with other versions. This often has to do with issues relating to *Shī'ah* concerns.[169]

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165 Ibid., pxxvii.
166 Ibid., p. xxviii.
167 See his arguments for Muḥammad's acceptance to migrate to Madīnah and also the rationale for the battle of Badr - supra.
168 See vol. VI, pp. xii-xvii.
169 Ibid.

Reflecting on the reliability of such early Islamic material, Watt mentions the attempts by Wansborough and his pupils Patricia Crone and Michael Cook in pouring scorn on them. They claim that the materials cited in primary scholarship are ahistorical since they either developed more than a century and a half after the 'alleged' events themselves or they related to some other ideology entirely.[170]

Watt however insists that there is enough proof that the early Islamic sources could be relied upon to reconstruct early Islamic history. He points out that

> Neither book has been favourably received by scholars in general, since both are based on many unjustified assumptions, and there seems little point in offering a detailed criticism of them.[171]

The historicity of such material is taken further in an elaborate discussion centering on the works of eminent Islamicists like Goldziher, Schacht, Lammens, Becker and Blachere who all questioned the reliability of the earlier Islamic scholars.[172] Watt, noting that much of the discussions in these works centre on the *hadīth*, claims that

> A saying which is of dogmatic or juristic interest is usually irrelevant to the historian (emphasis ours)[173]

Even though the statement looks a bit extravagant, by a careful wording inserting the adverb "usually" the scholar leaves only a little room for criticism. After all, any survey of the

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170 See Wansbrough J: Qur'ānic Studies, Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation, (London, 1977); Crone, P & Cook, M: Hagarism- The Making of the Islamic World, (Cambridge, 1977).

171 The History of al-Tabari, Vol. VI, p.xvii.

172 Ibid., pp.xvii -xxi.
See also: Watt's other paper entitled 'The Material's Used by Ibn Ishaq' in B. Lewis and P.M. Holt, Historians of the Middle East, (London, 1962), pp. 23-34
Goldziher, I., Muhammedanische Studien Vol. II, English edition by Stern, S.M., Muslim Studies, (London, 1971)
Schacht, J., The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence, (Oxford, 1950)
Becker, C.H., Islamstudien, (Leipzig, 1924) (also in Der Islam IV (1913), pp. 263ff)
Blachere, R., La Probleme de Mahomet, (Paris, 1952).

173 The History of al-Tabari, Vol. VI, p.xviii.

historical development of Islamic Religious Thought would have to be interested in dogmatic and juristic matters as historical events.

From that basis, Watt concludes that

> ... the critique of Hadith by Goldziher, Schacht, and others does not necessarily apply to the materials used in the Sīrah.[174]

He maintains that from the relative ages of some of the early writers, it is sound to at least assume that writings of considerable historical significance existed in the early days of Islam. In this consideration, he uses 'Urwah b. al-Zubair and al-Zuhrī as examples of people who were old enough to have seen history in the making or at least would have heard from people who were eyewitnesses or active participants in real events.[175]

Referring to Schacht's theory of 'family *isnāds*' which were thought to be mere attempts by certain families to glorify themselves through spurious *aḥādīth*, Watt takes the view that there is a real danger of unlimited application of this theory doing away with genuine historical issues. He points out that some of the details deal with such minor questions that a family would not find it that worthwhile to go through all that effort to invent them. He hence advises against dismissing everything out of hand, arguing:

> Each, however, should be considered on its merits and examined for inherent improbabilities and the presence of distorting motives.[176]

Genealogy with its strong base in the Arab psyche, poetry, and eventually the Qur'ān itself have all been considered by scholars as offering glimpses of history. To some, like Blachère, the Qur'ān is the only reliable source of material to reformulate the biography of Muḥammad.[177]

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174 Ibid., p. xix.
175 Ibid., pp. xx-xxi.
176 Ibid., p. xxiii.
177 See his La Probleme de Mahomet.

Watt cautions against using the Qur'ān as a history textbook pointing out the crucial difficulty of chronology.[178]

He explains that genealogies offer a rough guideline to history and poetry also

> ... gives some insight into people's feelings and attitudes, including the attitudes of a tribe or clan towards its rivals. Even when poems are not by the authors to whom they are ascribed, the information they give about attitudes may still be accurate.[179]

He emphasises that the critical challenge to modern scholarship is how to harmonize all this plethora of sources to arrive at an objective history of Islam and in this enterprise, it is not logical to reject anything without a sober analysis.

S. Salmān Nadvī reviews these two volumes under discussion and commends the efforts highly.[180]

He appreciated the titling of the various volumes which does not exist in the Arabic original.

The reviewer picks up one significant point to critique. It concerns the change of the *Qiblah* from Jerusalem to Makkah which the annotator (Watt) claims was a reflection of the worsening relations between the prophet and the Jews.

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178 The History of al-Ṭabarī Vol. VI, pp. xxiv-xxv.
See his own: The Meccan Prophet in the Qur'ān, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1987).

179 The History of al-Ṭabarī, Vol. VI, p. xxxv.

180 in Journal of Islamic Studies, Vol. 3, No. 1, (January 1992), pp. 114-116.

Nadvī writes that Watt is suggesting that the change was especially the prophet's own personal decision which then reflects his (Watt's) perception of the Qur'ān. He insists that

> If one studies the Qur'ānic verses (2:125, 142-50) together with the reports in al-Bukhārī, it is clear that the original Qiblah (the Ka'bah) was changed temporarily to Jerusalem by Divine command (2:143) and then God restored the original Qibla in Madinah (2:144).... As soon as the Divine Command for the change of Qibla came to the Prophet, it was changed in a single day during prayers (salah) in a mosque which is known to this day as the Mosque with two Qiblahs (Masjid al-Qiblatayn).[181]

Despite his largely appreciative stance, Nadvī sees a lot of conjectures in the analysis of some of the issues both in the annotation and even in the translation itself.[182]

In our interview with Watt in 1990, one of his fundamental concerns in contemporary Islam is what he felt was the rise of Islamic fundamentalism. In fact, he has published a book and an article on this subject.

In 1988, his book Islamic Fundamentalism and Modernity, appeared.[183] In the publishers blurb in the inner jacket, it is noted that Watt makes an attempt to demystify a subject which is often misunderstood and hence has caused a lot of Islamophobia especially in the West.

Watt's own objective is two-fold. He sets out to offer a discerning exposition of Islam to the West and also to critique what he considers to be a harmful introspective self-image of the Muslims which makes them fail to understand the West in modern times. To him, this pushes Muslims to the periphery of world affairs.

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181 Ibid., p. 116.
182 See Ibid.
183 London and New York: Routledge, 1988.

Without any preface or introduction, Watt plunges into his analysis by looking at the traditional self-image of Muslims.

In his opening statement, he states the thesis of the book. He says:

> ... the thinking of the fundamentalist Islamic intellectuals and of the great masses of ordinary Muslims is still dominated by the standard traditional Islam world-view and the corresponding self-image of Islam. This is a fact of great importance at the present time when the influence of Islam is increasing throughout the world, since it means that how contemporary problems are seen by many Muslims may be different from how they look to Western observers and statesmen.[184]

Touching on the title of the book, the scholar admits the inappropriateness of the journalistic parlance 'fundamentalism' but prefers to stick to it because it offers him the interpretation of 'literalism' which suits his critique.

Watt, discussing the sub-section dubbed 'The unchanging static world' seems to have run into a minefield. He sees Islam as a religion tied to the philosophy of 'unchangingness'. He states:

> It is very difficult for the Westerner to appreciate the outlook of those in whose thinking there is no place for development, progress or social advancement and improvement.

He then adds

> It was in my studies of the Islamic sects that I first became aware of the complete absence of the idea of development.[185]

Watt continues with what someone might perceive as a diatribe on Islam, that the Muslim argument that since there is no fundamental change in human nature the principles of the *Sharī'ah* are eternal means that Islam does not accept any idea of social reform.

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184 Ibid, p. 1.
185 Ibid., p. 3.

He even links this theory to the pre-Islamic 'primitive' Arab desert nomad life which was not amenable to change and hence, he argues, the development of the *Sunna* of the progenitors traditionally translated as 'the beaten path'.

Making reference to the Islamic concept of the finality of Prophethood, the scholar postulates that verse (33:40) which pertain to this has been misinterpreted by Muslims. He speculates:

> To the first herders this probably meant that Muhammad was the seal which confirmed the truth of previous prophets, but it is now universally interpreted by Muslims to mean that Muhammad is the last of the prophets, after whom there will be no other.[186]

The book carries a sub-section entitled, 'The Idealization of Muḥammad and Early Islam' where the author suggests that frantic efforts by Muslims to portray Muḥammad as the archetype make them propound 'theories' about him rejecting events with historical evidence which do not promote such thinking.

He gives examples as Muslim 'covering' Muḥammad's 'pagan past' and also rejecting the 'satanic verses' even though the sources available allude to these.

Watt makes a quick comparison of the Christian slogan 'Back to the Bible' to the Muslim demand for 'Back to the Qur'ān and Sunnah' condemning the Muslim idea while lauding the Christian conception. He argues that

> ... the idea of going back to the Qur'ān and the example of Muhammad means the idealization of a period of little more than twenty years in a region of the world where life was still somewhat primitive and barbaric. Nearly all Westerners whether God-fearing or not, are horrified that Muslims of today can contemplate the amputation of a hand as a punishment for theft or stoning as a punishment for adultery, even if only in a few precisely defined cases.[187]

186 Ibid., p. 7.
187 Ibid., p. 19.

In the epilogue, he 'forewarns' Muslims not to exist in

> ... the fortress in their medieval world-view

but to fully participate and share in

> ... the whole intellectual and cultural life of the human race.[188]

He demands that Muslims should broaden and reframe the *Sharī'ah* because, he assumes it is out of touch with modernity. This is because, he reasons

> Human beings in a mature civilization cannot accept such practices of the distant past as an ideal to be followed.[189]

This book has been heavily reviewed. Valerie J. Hoffman-Ladd sees Watt's exposition in the book as

> ... remarkably clear, insightful, and provocative ...[190]

The reviewer further sees Watt as playing the role of a Big Brother who offers 'helpful intellectual advice' to Muslims to

> ... join believers in the West in facing modernity without bankrupting themselves spiritually.[191]

In general, this view is very appreciative of the book's message.

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188 Ibid., p. 141.
189 Ibid., p. 142.
190 See his review of the book in IJMES (23) No. 3, (August 1991), pp. 414-417, quotation in p. 417.
191 Ibid., p. 416.

A. Qamaruddin offers a rather different taste of review.[192] His review questions the whole motivation behind the thesis of the book. He writes

> What the author does not tell us is to what degree contemporary or even relatively late expressions of fundamentalism are motivated by sectarian, economic, sociological and political factors, and to what extent they are, in spite of an orthodox legalism, essentially of modern Western inspiration.[193]

Watt's definition of 'development' or 'social reform' is taken to task by Qamaruddin who points out that

> ... the author's idea of development is clearly characterized by temporal evolution,...[194]

One thing he finds indignant about the book is what he believes is the apparent posture by Watt that the future of Islam and Muslims for that matter lies in the extent to which they ape others especially the West and the Christian way of doing things.[195]

He then concludes

> The ameliorative content of the book, in so far as modernity is concerned, is obvious and perhaps symptomatic of the approach. The error of this approach has been in its assuming that the questions posed by it were the only questions, whereas in reality they are based on premises which are not consonant with the realities they attempt to gauge.[196]

J. S. Nielsen, in his review of the same work, pays tribute to Watt's authority in the field acknowledging that the book offers some helpful ideas.[197]

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192 See IQ XXXV No. 2, (2nd. Quarter, 1991), pp. 140-145.
Also published in Islamica (Journal of the Islamic Society of the London School of Economics) Vol. 1 No. 2, (March 1993), pp. 26-27.

193 The review in IQ, Ibid., p. 142.

194 Ibid., p. 143.

195 Ibid., pp. 143-144.

196 Ibid., p. 145.

197 in New Community Vol. 15 No. 4 (July 1989), pp. 639-640.

However, in his overall assessment, he writes:

> There is a rough edge to the evaluations and judgements spread right through the book. It lacks the subtlety and flexibility of analysis which characterises the author's earlier works. This leads towards generalizations which sometimes tend to be simplistic. The reader with little previous knowledge in the field is likely to find stereotypes of Islam reinforced here.[198]

Nielsen takes issue with the central thread in Watt's argument that Islamic self-image moulded in the seventh century has become unshakeably static. He argues that the emphasis put on this completely denies the tremendous metamorphosis that has gone on in Islam over the centuries, and that is a very unfair and even untenable academic position to change. To completely ignore the profound elasticity in Islamic thought is unfortunate.

He also expresses dissatisfaction with the general tone of the book dealing with 'ideals' and points out the obvious absence of looking at the realities in the Islamic world. He hence concludes that

> The 'Islamic revolution' or resurgence has, as some scholars are recognizing, represented an enfranchisement of the broader 'masses' of the Muslim world. Islam is, in such circumstances, not static. It is, on the contrary, at the beginning of a period of a Kulturkampf of immense proportion.[199]

It was also in the same year of 1988 that his study entitled Muhammad's Mecca - History in the Qur'ān was published.[200]

The book has the objective of looking for

> ... as much historical material as possible for the Meccan period of Muhammad's career from the Holy Qur'ān.[201]

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198 Ibid., p. 640.
199 Ibid.
200 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1988).
201 Ibid., p. vii.

The book has a further objective of continuing the discussion began in the earlier publication on Muḥammad's early life in Makkah.

He points out that many scholars of the twentieth century have concluded that the Holy Qur'ān is the only credible source of the life of Muḥammad. This, he says, has come about because of the harsh criticisms against *ḥadīth* literature rejecting them as reliable material for Muḥammad's biography.

Even though Watt himself does not seem to subscribe to this theory wholly, he is of the view that much of *ḥadīth* literature does not have any relevance to the historian. He argues that the *aḥādīth* are mainly useful to the legal experts and theologians and not historians as such.

Watt makes a bold statement regarding the prophethood of Muḥammad thus:

> Personally, I am convinced that Muhammad was sincere in believing that what came to him as revelation (Wahy) was not the product of conscious thought on his part. I consider that Muhammad was truly a prophet, and think that we Christians should admit this on the basis of the Christian principle that 'by their fruits you will know them', since through the centuries Islam has produced many upright and saintly people. If he is a prophet, too, then in accordance with the Christian doctrine that the Holy Spirit spoke by the prophets, the Qur'ān may be accepted as of divine origin. In saying this, however, I do not exclude the possibility that God makes his revelations through a person's unconscious mind; and indeed something of this sort seems to be required if we are to explain adequately all the phenomena.[202]

He stresses the 'Arabic' origin of the Qur'ān and cites the statement in Surah 12:2 explaining that this does not merely imply that the language of revelation was Arabic but its first addresses were Arabs whose perception of things had to be adequately addressed. The stakes are raised further by dwelling on the hypothesis that Muḥammad's journey to prophethood and his whole

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202 Ibid., p. 1.

life was shaped by the environment. It is this which makes him suggest that the Qur'ān has mistaken ideas about Christian and Jewish beliefs and also that its cosmology is primitive.[203]

Looking at chronology in the Qur'ān, Watt refers to some Western studies on this subject and their attempts at rearranging the Qur'ān in a 'proper' order. Here, he mentions Muir, Grimme, Noldeke, Bell and Blachere. He sees Noldeke's study as the most successful while he also admits Blachère's as the most modern and hence the one he relies on.

He rejects the rendering of the term '*ummī*' as 'illiterate' and interprets it as 'gentile' or 'unscriptured' arguing that the general level of literacy in Makkah was high.

Coupled with Muḥammad's own business transactions on behalf of Khadījah, he argues further, he must have had enough literacy to enable him to at least keep commercial records. He states that:

> Thus the *ummī* prophet is the non-Jewish, or Gentile prophet, whom Muslims held to be foretold in the Bible, and who was sent by God to his own non-Jewish or heathen people, as well as to the Jews and perhaps Christians.[204]

He emphasises however that Muḥammad's literacy does not mean he had a direct insight into the Bible.

The scholar explains his criterion for sanctioning Muḥammad's prophethood. He writes:

> In any case the experienced 'manner' of revelation is not a guarantee of genuineness, since Muhammad at first thought the 'satanic verses' were genuine. It is the 'fruits' which are the ultimate criterion of genuineness.[205]

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203 Ibid., pp. 2-3, 5-6, 36-38.
See our own review of the book in: ICMR Vol. 1, No. 2, (December 1990), pp. 286-289.

204 Muḥammad's Mecca, p. 53.

205 Ibid., p. 68.

Sami Angawi reviews this book in the Journal of Islamic Studies[206] and points out some assertions in the book which will

> ... not only fail to satisfy scholarly criteria but would also be unacceptable to Muslims for whom the Qur'ān is a divine book protected by Allah from any alteration.[207]

In his general assessment of the book Angawi is of the opinion that it has a particular tint which Muslims would find highly objectionable. He points out some examples:

> Qur'ānic cosmology, for instance, is referred to as being not only 'mistaken' (1) but also 'primitive' (6). Similarly certain Qur'ānic statements about Judaism and Christianity are said to be not just 'mistaken' (2,37,45) but 'palpably false' (44) ...[208]

He accuses Watt of having a shallow understanding of the Qur'ānic concepts he deals with. The reviewer again points out that even though Watt makes some passing references to the Universal Message of the Qur'ān there is an implicit denial of this in the tone of the book. He thus concludes the review:

> The book is highly speculative and thus at best inconclusive in its claims.... A certain amount of speculation is of course necessary in this sort of attempt at historical reconstruction; but if the author had recognized a little more universality in the phenomena being discussed, he might at least have understood them rather better from his own experience instead of being limited to such unconvincing conclusions.[209]

In 1989, in the Studia Missionalia Watt published an article entitled 'Islam and Peace'.[210] Watt asserts in the opening part of the article that even though Islam is presented by Muslims as the religion of peace their approach to peace is different from that of the Christian. He

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206 Vol. 3, No. 2 (July 1992), pp. 240-243.
207 Ibid., p. 242.
208 Ibid.
209 Ibid., pp. 242-243.
210 Vol. 39, pp. 167-178.
This particular volume of the Studia Missionalia carries the theme 'Peace and Religions'.

argues that the reason is because Islam began as a political movement while Christians were apolitical until some three centuries after the death of Christ.

He continues that the '*pax Islamica*' Muḥammad established was deeply steeped in the old Arabian sport of raiding others and hence when many surrounding tribes around Madīna accepted Islam, a new outlet had to be sought for the 'excessive energy' they had to satisfy their warlike passion.

He speculates that lands in Syria and Iraq and probably beyond came under the purview of Islam through such arrangement.[211] He makes reference to the deduction of law from Qur'ānic principles and also from the mass of tradition from the prophet and his four rightly guided caliphs saying that Muslims believe that through these all problems of humankind would be solved. He then writes:

> This simple-minded and unrealistic assertion is almost certain to lead to disillusionment among the Muslim masses when it is realized that the problems are not being solved.[212]

Touching on a talk said to have been given by an Imām of the Aḥmadiyya Community concerning the Islamic ethics of war, Watt comments that there do not seem to be any *Sunnī* jurists who would look at the issue of peace in a realistic way and differentiate the period of Muḥammad from our present times. He continues

> We still wait for Muslim traditionalists to convince non-Muslims that Islam as they conceive it has an important contribution to make to world peace.[213]

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211 Ibid., pp. 168-169.
212 Ibid., p. 171.
213 Ibid., p. 173.

This seems to be a veiled indictment of Islam as a religion of hostility instead of peace. He however notes attempts by what he calls liberal and better-educated Muslims, represented here by the late Fazlur Rahmān and Moḥammad Arkoun, to change the traditionalist image of Islam which he considers not conductive to the modern world.[214]

Another work of significance to cite is that entitled Early Islam - Collected Articles which came out in 1990.[215] This is an anthology of articles Watt has published in eminent journals spanning the period of 1943 to 1983.

They are put into two groups with the first part covering 'Muḥammad and the Qur'ān' and the second centering on 'Early Islamic Thought'.

This project has a specific interest in the articles in the first group some of which we have already looked at in this ongoing Intellectual Biography discussion. As Watt himself states in the introduction the articles focus on his main disciplines of research.

The items are not arranged chronologically but one significant thing which immediately catches the eye is that the scholar begins with the article on the Banū Qurayzah issue. This, from most of the works of Watt, has become a favourite theme and one wonders whether by putting it first here, Watt is not giving credence to this assertion that his selection of themes is often biased against the Muslims.

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214 See pp. 175-176.
215 Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

However, Watt, the often careful historian he is, points out a methodological dictum in research which is very significant. In the article on 'The Reliability of Ibn Isḥāq's Sources', he writes:

> ... it is worth reminding ourselves of a general principle of all historical research, namely, that the ostensible sources for any series of events are always to be accepted unless some grounds can be shown for their rejection or partial rejection.[216]

Andrew Rippin, in his review of this book appreciates the tone and general arrangement of the articles.[217] He refers to the above statement and argues that Watt seems to hold a view not very different from the outlook of the eight and ninth century Muslim historians which basically means

> ... retelling 'what really happened', filtered of course, through our own contemporary sense of 'what makes sense',[218]

Rippin is of the view that this perspective is not good enough for the enormity of the mission facing the researcher. He however values the articles as a

> ... fitting reminder of the contribution he has made.[219]

1991 saw the publication of one of Watt's most recent books entitled Muslim-Christian Encounters: Perceptions and Misconceptions.[220]

Peter B. Clarke of King's College, London in his estimation of the book remarks that Watt shows an exceptional expertise in dealing with a rather complex subject.[221] The work

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216 Ibid., pp. 13-14.
217 See BSOAS Vol. 55 Part 1, (1992), pp. 195-196.
218 Ibid., p. 196.
219 Ibid.
220 Published in London by Routledge.
221 Ibid. See the short comments on the back cover.

itself is said to be a culmination of half a century of Watt's involvement in the field of academic study of Islam and Christianity.

The book begins with an assessment of the kind of Christianity that Islam met in Arabia. This has become another passionate theme for Watt with the underlying argument being Islam encountered a garbled form of Christianity which no 'true' Christian could recognize. He then reasons that that is exactly why the Qur'ānic critique of Christian doctrine is, as he finds it, so strange.[222] He recycles his arguments' on lack of historical consciousness among the Makkans explaining this accounts for the nature of the Qur'ānic 'caricature' image of Christianity.[223]

Watt looks at Muslim encounters with Greek philosophy, encounters with Christians and others when Islam was in its period of ascendancy and also encounters with medieval Europe. A discussion is also made of encounters in the present period ending with a reflection on the future prospects.

In the concluding chapter he devoted a section to the question of religious exclusivity pointing out that

> ... exclusivist views cannot be held within the emerging world culture, because social science is part of the Western intellectual outlook, and social-scientific observation of religions shows that they are all doing more or less the same things, with similar aims and with a measure of success.[224]

It is on the basis of this that he employs the 'Sermon on the Mount' criterion of evaluating a religion or religious personality teachings.

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222 Ibid., chapters1, 2 and 3, passim.

223 See his other work entitlted Muhammad's Mecca - History in the Qur'ān passim.

224 Muslim-Christian Encounters, p. 138.

He however notes that since religion is dynamic despite the fact that scripture might not suffer change, the yardstick of 'fruits' is an unstable one since the 'fruits' might differ from year to year.

He calls on Muslims

> ... to abandon their exclusivism.... reinterpret their conception of the finality of Islam and of Muhammad's being the last prophet.

He continues

> In respect of Muslim-Christian relations it is essential that Muslims accept the historicity of the Bible and reject the doctrine of its corruption. That doctrine contradicts known facts, such as the existence of manuscripts dating from long before the time of Muhammad.[225]

He refers to the enormous amount of critical scientific scholarship which has been brought to bear on the Christian scriptures over the years and pleads that these writings have inspired Jews and Christians since the earliest times, and hence, by implication could not be false.

Hence, he says finally:

> What Muslims and other non-Christians are asked to accept in this world where religions mix is this core of historical fact about the teaching and achievement of Jesus as a human being, but without the theological interpretations.[226]

In a review, Jorgen S. Nielsen,[227] appreciated Watt's earlier scholarly works on Islam and Christian-Muslim relations and welcomes the book at a critical moment in the history of such relations especially in the light of the Gulf crisis.

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225 Ibid., p. 149.

226 Ibid., p. 150.

227 See New Community Vol. 18 No. 2, (January 1992), pp. 342-343.

Nielsen points out that the title of the book should be understood as encounters both positive and negative between Christians and the Muslim World as such and not the narrow confines of Islam and Christianity.

In Watt's effort to reflect and search for solutions to the problems of Inter-faith relations, he falls on his theological roots asking both Christians and Muslims to take a hard look at their scriptures and the interpretations and theologies built around them which often seem to reinforce the attitude of exclusivity. Nielsen asks a question which a non-theologian would feel is at the heart of the issue. He writes:

> ... from outside the field of theology however, I feel that one must ask the theologians why it should not be possible to live together in reasonable harmony even if one differs in one's theological views. Equally, though, the question must be asked of the social scientist why theological doctrines so easily become the ammunition for material interests.[228]

Mary Hossain's review is rather less complimentary.[229] While she agrees that the book has very valuable information on many issues, she is at pains to point out that

> ...there are also many examples of dubious arguments presented as proven facts without reference to the work of Muslim scholars.[230]

She identifies the second chapter as particularly problematic where expressions Watt uses suggest that the revelation of the Qur'ān was almost wholly contingent upon the historical environment that it came from.

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228 Ibid.

229 See JIS Vol. 3 No. 2, (July 1992), pp. 257-258.

230 Ibid., p. 257.

The reviewer takes issue with Watt regarding assertions in the book that the Qur'ān presents a wrong perception of Christianity and that there are a lot of inaccuracies with respect to certain historical personalities.[231]

She notes with concern the criterion that Watt uses to judge the validity of a religious faith - 'the fruits' - which in itself is overtly Christian. She then writes:

> Suitable for those religions whose doctrines are expressed in symbolic terms, this would dilute unnecessarily the straightforward and unambiguous message of the Qur'ān. It is the first step towards a free-for-all in which language can mean whatever one wants it to mean and religious truth disappears ...[232]

In her concluding appraisal she observes:

> This is a stimulating and interesting, but irritating book.

continuing

> Watt has covered an enormous amount of ground and, in his suggestions for the future, has posed questions which must be answered. His book, however, although full of scholarly information, useful brief critical surveys, and much that is positive, also contains, as well as the dogmatic statements already mentioned, unconvincing speculation, notably on Muslim motives behind the strong reaction to the satanic verses (42, 122) and the Islamic resurgence (124), and strange comparisons between, for example, the suffering of Jesus and the hypothetical suffering of non-fundamentalist Muslims trying to establish a different kind of Islam (37).[233]

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231 Ibid.
Such reasoning could also be colated in his Muḥammad's Mecca.

232 See Mary Hossain's review, p. 258.

233 Ibid.
The numbers in brackets are page number references from the book itself.

In the same year (1991) Watt published an article entitled 'Women in the Early Islam' in the Studia Missionalia[234] which was an attempt as a non-anthropologist, as he says, to give a summary of his findings on the subject as reflected in his earlier study back in 1956.[235]

Watt asserts that the Qur'ānic amelioration of the existent social system was to change the matrilineal system to the patrilineal which was indicative of the economic situation at the time which promoted individualism. He acknowledges the advances that Islam brought to the women in that environment. He cites from his own earlier work Muḥammad at Medīna thus:

> Both by European Christian standards and by those of Islam, many of the old practices were immoral, and Muḥammad's reorganization was therefore a moral advance.[236]

In 1992, in the same Studia Missionalia in the volume with the theme 'Religious Sects and Movements - Christianity and Other Religions', Watt publishes an article on 'Islamic Fundamentalism'.[237]

Trying to identify the reasons for fundamentalism he notes that it is essentially a form of response to a highly sophisticated world where advancement in science and technology has led to a stranglehold on cultures. People, he argues, are facing identity crisis and are fearing the loss of their culture which would then be tantamount to loss of their very souls.[238]

Even though he identifies fundamentalism in Protestant Christianity, he suggests that this fear of the extensive domination of science and technology is more pervasive in Islam. He

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234 Vol. 40, pp. 161-173.
235 See his: Muḥammad at Medīna.
236 'Women in the Early Islam', p. 163.
237 Vol. 41, pp. 241-252.
238 Ibid., pp. 241-242.

again asserts that the developments in the modern world with its concomitant effect of loss of authority among the traditional Islamic scholars led to the latter offering

> ... the intellectual form to Islamic fundamentalism ...[239]

in anticipation of retention of their authority. He makes references to Qur'ānic claims on finality of prophethood and revelation as seen in the person of Muḥammad and the Qur'ān respectively and reasons that the original meaning of these verses might have been something else other than contemporary Muslim understanding. This position then, of course, dismisses the role of *ḥadīth* in exegesis.

Watt then continues asserting that the cultivation of this self-image of Islam led Muslims to believe

> ... the non-Islamic world not as a field for making conversions as Christian missionaries might have done, but as a sphere to be dominated by force.[240]

This method of using a Christian yardstick to measure Islamic principles and the comparison of ideals of one religion to the realities in the other is not a very helpful principle in scholarship. Here, again, Watt seems to be reinforcing the old perception of Islam and its obsession with forcing people to submit to the faith.

In fact, many of the arguments in this article are also to be found in his 1988 publication on the same subject.[241]

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239 Ibid., p. 243.

240 Ibid., p. 246.

241 See his Islamic Fundamentalism and Modernity and see also our discussion on this book in this very section of the project.

Watt, in the article, goes on looking at the Western perception of Islam and the response from Muslims which has generally been critical. Watt, however, explains that the criticism of Western scholars has come about because,

> ... some of the objective facts found by orientalists in Islamic sources are contrary to features of the traditionalist self-image of Islam.[242]

He himself, however, admits that the 'Orientalists' have had a very selective attitude to Islamic studies. He notes:

> The orientalists at most thought of themselves as correcting faulty views held by Muslims. What should certainly be admitted, however, is that for the most part they showed little interest in the positive religious values of Islam.[243]

Watt looks at the criticism of Muslims levelled against Christian missionaries of collaborating with colonialists to destroy Islam and rejects the arguments as exaggeration. He claims that Christian missionaries did not make many inroads into Muslim communities and hence there was change of emphasis to provision of humanitarian assistance. He mentions schools and hospitals in particular.

Again, he refers to the Christian initiatives in inter-faith dialogue and seems to suggest that this proves the sincerity of the Christians in the promotion of mutual understanding and co-operation. He then writes

> It should also be admitted, however, that some minor Christian bodies have a hostile attitude towards Islam and produce books criticizing it, though such books have little academic value. Thus, though the accusation of missionaries by the fundamentalists is not wholly mistaken it is very wide of the mark. (sic.)[244]

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242 'Islamic Fundamentalism', p. 248.

243 Ibid.

244 Ibid., p. 249-250.

This interesting statement is not entirely in accordance with peoples' perception of the missionary enterprise and the position of Christendom vis-a-vis the Muslim world. Until recently, the official position of the Catholic Church, for example, was very different from what Watt is suggesting.[245]

Watt concludes his article by admitting that what he calls Islamic fundamentalism is not representative of Islam as a whole. Acknowledging the fact that both Muslims and Christians have a responsibility to fight against secularism and consumerism in the contemporary world, he advocates that every effort has to be made towards Inter-faith dialogue and real co-operation in matters of mutual practical significance.

In 1993, Watt again publishes in the Studia Missionalia in the volume dedicated to 'Theology of Religions - Christianity and Other Religions'.[246] The title of the article is 'Islamic Attitudes to Other Religions'.

He writes that the attitudes of Muslims towards people of other faiths are basically conditioned by the environment of the prophet. This could be read as against the universalistic nature of the Qur'ānic message and the fact that the revelation and indeed any revelation cuts across time and space.

Watt then makes a statement similar to an earlier one he made in his Muḥammad's Mecca - History in the Qur'ān on the status of Muḥammad.[247]

He writes:

> Personally I hold that we must accept Muhammad as a prophet who was similar to the Old Testament prophets.[248]

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245 It was the Second Vatican Council which brought about this quantum leap in the perception of the Catholic Church as far as Islam is concerned.

246 Vol. 42, pp. 245-255.

247 See p. 1 of this work.

248 'Islamic Attitudes', p. 245.

He then clarifies his position by saying

> The traditional Muslim view, however, is that the revelations in the Qur'ān are the actual words of God, and therefore inerrant. This view the Christian cannot admit, since there is in the Qur'ān a denial of the death of Jesus on the Cross. What I would say, however, is that, while the central doctrines of the Qur'ān are from God, its teaching is expressed in terms, not merely of the Arabic language, but of the views about the world and human life held by people of Mecca, including some of their misconceptions.[249]

By holding Muḥammad as a Hebrew prophet Watt leaves room for the ideas of the thought world of the Arabs to 'slip' into the Qur'ān. He reiterates that these ideas were not concocted by Muḥammad though

> ... but came to him in some other way.[250]

Noting that Muḥammad and his people had some semblance of Christian and Jewish influence Watt however claims that even though many Biblical prophets and personalities are mentioned in the Qur'ān

> ... the Qur'ānic picture of them is completely different, especially in the earlier passages.[251]

He mentions specific examples like Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus providing extensive references from the Qur'ān to support his contention.

He continues

> While there are thus numerous references to Biblical matters in the Qur'ān, it must be insisted that its presentation of the Jewish religion is seriously inadequate and indeed misleading.[252]

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249 Ibid.
250 Ibid., p. 246.
251 Ibid.
252 Ibid., p. 250.

Watt is of the view that the way the Qur'ān presents events in a 'haphazard' or 'disconnected' way, as far as he is concerned, is on the principle of pre-Islamic thought which did not pay attention to continuity in history.[253]

He claims that in the early period of Islamic scholarship when the doctrines of Islam were agreed upon, every effort was made to outlaw the study of other cultures and especially other religions. Muslims, from this assertion were living in intellectual isolation and this fostered an unhealthy attitude towards others.

He makes an exceptional mention of the twelfth century Asharite theologian al-Shahrastānī whose study of sects offers extensive insight into Christianity.[254]

In his concluding remarks Watt maintains that

> If the attitude of Islam to other religions is to be summed up in a word, it is that, as far as possible, they were to be ignored.... At the moment the safest conclusion would be that the objective study of other religions by Muslims is still in its infancy.[255]

The latest work of Watt is his Islamic Creeds - A Selection which is a collection of classical credal works by Muslim theologians.[256]

The interest here lies in the introductory chapters before the creeds themselves. These deal with the historical background of Islamic theology, a discussion on basic articles of belief, a note on literature and some technical terms which appear in the texts which are translated.

After noting that there are structural differences in Christianity and Islam, the scholar seems to identify the reason for such difference. He suggests that Christians needed the

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253 Ibid. See also p. 245.
254 Ibid., pp. 252-253.
255 Ibid., pp. 254-255.
256 Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994.

elaborate structural arrangement of bishops and others to look after a community that has often found itself as a minority. In the case of Islam, however, he asserts that the political nature of the faith itself enables it to find some form of self-sufficiency or autonomy and even though

> ... in some of the conquered lands they were for a time in minority, they were still politically supreme. Because the Muslim community had a political structure, no need was felt to have some further structure to deal with purely religious matters.[257]

He acknowledges that in spite of the lack of such an authoritative body in Islam, even in theological issues Muslims displayed a

> ... considerable skill in reaching a common mind or consensus.... in these fields, and this justified al-Shāfi'īs inclusion of consensus among the roots of law.[258]

In the discussions on some articles of faith, the short sections dealing with the *shahādah*, the Qur'ān, the prophethood of Muḥammad and so forth are largely non-ammital. They state the basic beliefs of the Muslims without any overlay of the scholar's own interpretation as we have seen in his earlier works. Our guess is that since the creeds are merely being translated the need was not felt for any elaborate, critical remarks.

From this rather long survey of Watt's thought essentially on Islam one can have a fairly accurate picture of the scholar and his outlook on Islam in general and the prophet in particular.

We are of the opinion that in our contemporary times, W. Montgomery Watt more than any other English scholar has had the widest and most vigorous insight into the field under discussion.

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257 Ibid., p. 3.
258 Ibid., p. 4.

In our next section, a specific appreciation of his two volume work on Muḥammad which later came to be summarised into one volume will be made.[259]

5.2 MUḤAMMAD AT MECCA

5.2.1 STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

The short introduction to the book on the jacket (back cover) by the publisher sets out, basically, the status of the book in the context of academic study of Islam in general and Muḥammad in particular.

It is said that the book was written to satisfy an apparent appetite in academia for

> ... a fresh life of the Holy Prophet set in a fuller historical context.

The reader is also informed that Watt takes special care of traditional sources and uses the Qur'ān as a key source. Watt, it is further said, examines Muḥammad afresh looking at the economic and socio-political factors which were operative during the period. The scholar nevertheless does not stop at these constituents as the only ones which offer a fuller explanation to the issues of the era when Muḥammad appeared. He in effect, does not think that pure academic paradigm per se is enough to study Muḥammad comprehensively.

From this information, one is thus given the impression that Watt breaks fresh grounds and sets himself apart from the mass of material that has been produced over the ages on the subject.

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[259] Here we mean:
Muḥammad at Mecca (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953)
Muḥammad at Medīna (Oxford: Oxford University Press,1956)
and Muḥammad - Prophet and Statesman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961).

Indeed, in his own preface to the work, the author mentions, among other things, that his own teacher Richard Bell deserves a tribute since he consulted him on a number of issues. He however points out that Bell had some misgivings about the thesis of the book.

The fact that Watt mentions the differences of opinion with his own teacher, Bell, is most significant. It is indicative of his preparedness to try to break free from the dominant paradigm in the interpretation of Muḥammad at this time.

In fact, in his revision of Bell's work, Introduction to the Qur'ān, the scholar makes a critical remark on the assumptions in the book and points out the need for a new perspective befitting the age we are in.[260]

The book[261] divides into six main parts each with well-defined sub-divisions. Before the first part, Watt sets out his own objectives and ground plan for the work in an introduction.

The first part then looks at the Arabian background of the prophet probing into the socio-political, economic, religious and intellectual context in which the subject falls.

The second part focuses on the early life up to the prophetic call and discusses the ancestral history of Muḥammad, his birth and infancy, marriage, and the call to his mission. He then introduces a subsection to appreciate the prophetic consciousness of Muḥammad and ends the part with a short chronology of events in the Makkan era.

Part three examines the message of the prophet analysing the Qur'ān regarding its dating, the essence of the earliest revealed passages, setting them in the context of early seventh century Makkah. This part concludes with a section entitled 'Further Reflections" which divides into two sub-sections taking up the issues of the effect of the economic situation in Makkah on the Message of Islam, and also the theory on the originality of the Qur'ān.

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260 vide supra, 4.1.2 footnote 54.

261 Mecca.

"The First Muslims' is the subject of the fourth part investigating conversions and accounts of converts ending with the general impact of Muḥammad's message on the society in general.

The fifth part focuses on the issue of opposition. It investigates the so-called 'Satanic Verses', the first migration to Abyssinia, the methods of opposition and presents what he deems Qur'ānic evidence to show that what happened could not be termed persecution in stricto sensu.[262] This analysis fulfils Watt's dominant method of relying on the Qur'ān as a primary source of historical material. The prominent leaders of the opposition front and their motives are discussed up to the end of this part.

Part six which has the title of 'Expanding Horizons' looks at Muḥammad's attempt to widen the spectrum of his mission by venturing outside Makkah. It hence looks at the difficult personal problems the prophet faced with the demise of both his wife and uncle within the first decade of his call. The abortive preaching mission to al-Ṭā'if is discussed together with the advances he made towards inviting the Bedouins to accept his message. A section is devoted to the al-'Aqabah discussions culminating with the main Hijrah. This, and indeed the main part of the book ends with a short two-page assessment of the Makkan era of the prophet's work.

The book closes with an Eight-Point Addendum which runs from the Ahabish theory, through the question of Judaeo-Christian influences, the Ḥanīfs, survey of prominent Makkan Muslims and unbelievers, to a short analysis of traditions from 'Urwah b. az-Zubayr with regard to the Makkan period.

The addendum ends with the first Ḥijrah to Abyssinia and looks at those who were supposed to have returned to join the Muslim forces at the various battles which ensued. In the

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262 Ibid., p. 123.

last topic, Watt makes an attempt to account for what he perceives to be a short-fall in the numbers of those who migrated and those who returned.

5.2.2 SOURCES

One characteristic of Watt which could probably be described as his Marque de Fabrique is his concern for the sources he makes use of. In almost every writing of his, the reader is given a foretaste of what to expect. He literally lays bare the sources of his material usually analysing them to set the tone for the discussion. Whether one agrees with his interpretation of the sources or not is beside the point. He at least affords the reader the opportunity for a follow up.

Again, he almost always makes his standpoint clear so that the reader, if he happens to critique, might be able to find a foundation for that critique.

In this particular work, he does just the same. In the introductory pages, he sets out a handsome bibliography giving the classical works he uses and explaining all symbols that one might encounter especially in the footnotes.

This attitude is a mark of erudition because the reader could check the sources comparing them with his own interpretation of events.

Watt divides the introduction into two sections. The first section deals with his standpoint while the second concerns the sources used.

He points out that his target readership could fall into three groups - historians, Muslims and Christians. He again states that he has endeavoured to be as dispassionate as possible providing an example with respect to references to Qur'ānic verses. He writes:

> ... for example, in order to avoid deciding whether the Qur'ān is or is not the Word of God, I have refrained from using the expressions 'God says' and 'Muḥammad says' when referring to the Qur'ān, and have simply said 'the Qur'ān says'.[263]

He then continues immediately thus:

> I do however, regard the adoption of a materialistic outlook as implicit in historical impartiality, but write as a professing monotheist.[264]

Watt argues against a purely academic outlook on Muḥammad which he thinks is not adequate to understand such a figure and demands a theological appreciation as well. Hence, he maintains that despite the fact that he has respected the demands of Western academic historical scholarship in his own estimation, there is nothing expressed in the book which could mean vilification of any cardinal article of faith in Islam. He does not see any serious problems in applying the principles of Western academic lore in the study of Islam. He argues:

> There need be no unbridgeable gulf between Western scholarship and Islamic faith. If some of the conclusions of Western scholars have been unacceptable to Muslims, it may be that the scholars have not always been faithful to their own principles of scholarship and that, even from the purely historical point of view, their conclusion requires to be revised.[265]

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263 Ibid., p. x.
264 Ibid.
265 Ibid.

The scholar then goes further asking Muslims to reconstruct or modify their doctrines without, as he puts it

> ... any change in essentials.[266]

He reasons that students of Islam in the twentieth century have been craving for a new look at Muḥammad not necessarily because of the availability of new material. It is primarily

> ... because in the last half-century or so historians' interests and attitudes have altered, and in particular because they have become more conscious of the material factors underlying history.[267]

He explains that this suggests many more questions are now being raised in the context of the socio-political and economic milieu in which Islam found itself.

Watt asserts that the present work does not merely analyse material more carefully than others on the market but perhaps, more importantly, it

> ... attempts to answer many questions that have hardly been raised in the past.[268]

It is a fact that Muslims and Islam for that matter, have become more prominent in the socio-political and economic debates in the contemporary world. The shifting paradigms in these areas in the modern world and the attendant upheavals have almost always found Islam either at the centre or somewhere close to it. Islam now, probably more than ever, can be seen as an anti-systemic force. It is hence very natural that interest in Islam and its adherents should heighten.

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266 Ibid.
267 Ibid., p. xi.
268 Ibid.

In the note on the sources, Watt states his primary ones to be the Qur'ān and also the classical material from the third and fourth century after *Hijra*.

As for the classical material, the scholar focuses on the Sīrah of Ibn Hishām, the Annals of al-Ṭabarī, the Maghāzī of al-Wāqidī and the Ṭabaqāt of Ibn Sa'd. Further material is derived from Bukhārī, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, Ibn al-Athīr and Ibn Ḥajar.

He praises Ibn Isḥāq whose work he relies on Ibn Ḥishām to obtain, pointing out that he organized his materials carefully.[269] He however has higher praise for Ibn Ḥishām not only for a faithful recension of Ibn Isḥāq but also for his own valuable additions.

He cites a statement from Frants Buhl which is a valuable advice in dealing with historical data especially in periods of great rivalry within the organization or group under survey.

It says:

> ... in dealing with the traditional material one must always be on one's guard, where a definite party-interest may be supposed, not to be led astray by its sometimes innocent-looking appearance.[270]

Watt however, urges that the possibility or even probability of such a bent being brought to bear on a historical narrative should not, in itself, deprive us of the opportunity to make a sound judgement. One could as he points out,

> ... make allowance for the distortion and ... present the data in an unbiased form;...[271]

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269 For further insight into Watt's regard for Ibn Isḥāq, see his article: 'The Materials used by Ibn Isḥāq' in Lewis, B & Holt, P. M. (eds.), The Historians of the Middle East, (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), pp. 23-34.

270 Watt, Mecca, p. xiii.
(Cited from F. Buhl: Das Leben Muhammeds German Translation by H.H. Schaeder, Lepzig 1930).

271 Watt, Mecca, p. xiii.

He further explains that, this theory, called 'tendential shaping' of events due to party interest occurs especially when people try to assign reasons for a particular event. Often, he says, the main actor would assign a meritorious motive for the act while his opponents would attribute it to the exact opposite. The student should therefore keep this in mind while interpreting data especially in periods when history was not distinct as he suggests, as an example, the pre-Hijrah times of Islamic history.[272]

He advises a self-reconstruction of motives in cases where reasonable doubt seems to exist.

The writer then states his own procedure of dealing with such issues in the book under discussion. He writes:

> In dealing then, with the background of Muḥammad's career and his Meccan period I have proceeded on the view that the traditional accounts are in general to be accepted, are to be received with care and as far as possible corrected where 'tendential shaping' is suspected, and are only to be rejected outright where there is internal contradiction.[273]

He, for example, gives the genealogical structure in Ibn Saʿd as something fascinating and probably unbelievable to the average Western mind. However, he reasons, the fascination in itself should not make the material implausible because, he asks:

> Who would have taken the trouble to invent all this intricate network, and for what reason?[274]

In his consideration of the Qur'ān as a primary source-material, Watt notes the difficulties of

> ... determining the chronological order of the various parts and the uncertainty of many of the results

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272 Vide Ibid., p. xiv.
273 Ibid.
274 Ibid.
In modern scholarship however, this ignores social-anthropological view of genealogy.

and the fact that

> ... the Qur'ān is partial and fragmentary.[275]

He is of the view that, due to these difficulties, there is the need to look at the socio-political and economical environment in which Islam was cradled in order to have a balanced picture.

He has a rather interesting methodology concerning traditional reports in the Makkan and the Madīnan periods. In the former period, he accepts material basing himself solely on the *Matn* (the text of the tradition) neglecting the *Isnād* (the chain of narrators) while in the latter period, he accepts the *Matn* through an analysis of the *Isnād*. The rationale for applying this inconsistent methodology is unfortunately not very clear from the discussion.

In the discussion which follows we examine the themes Watt selects as significant in his assessment of Muḥammad in Makkah noting any lacunae and attempting to seek reasons why he selects particular themes and avoids others which we think are also important.

5.2.3 SELECTED THEMES

In this section, the dominant themes in this particular publication will be considered. This approach, apart from the fact that it is consistent with other parts of the thesis, also enables us to understand the scholar's own favourite issues and probably makes it possible for us to discern whether Watt merely follows other late nineteenth century and early twentieth century scholars especially those key ones we are critiquing, or is he able to break the mould and set out a fresh outlook on Muḥammad? If the latter becomes our finding, then the scholar has really lived up to his promise of providing his readers with a fresh insight into the subject.[276]

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275 Ibid., p. xv.
276 See the jacket of the book.

THE BACKGROUND

Watt states the aim of this discussion which is the subject of chapter one. It is, he says, to bring into focus

> ... those features of the background which are most important for a proper understanding of ...

the life and work of Muḥammad.[277] Taking up the economic feature first, he argues that even though Gibb has maintained that the desert environment per se was irrelevant in the shaping of Islam,

> ... nonetheless in the total phenomenon of Islam the desert has a role of first importance.[278]

The position of the two dominant cities in early Islamic history, Makkah and Madīnah, with the constant interchange between them and the Bedouin tribes, offers a student an opportunity to look at the desert economics vis-a-vis Islam.

Watt discusses the climatic differences in various parts of the areas of the Hijaz and the Nejd resulting in the need for migration of shepherds and their flocks. The crucial importance of the camel and the date is pointed out.

Due to the nature of the land, the constant - usually rough - interaction of the nomads and the settlers in the lush green belts is unavoidable hence the question of raiding and general brigandry.

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277 Ibid., p. 1.

278 Ibid.
See H.A.R. Gibb, Mohammedanism - A Historical Survey, Oxford etc.: Oxford University Press, 1969, p. 1.

Watt's analysis brings into sharp focus the harsh realities of the differences between Makkah on the one hand and areas in al-Ṭā'if and Madīnah on the other. These concern agricultural viability of the lands. He emphasises that in Makkah agriculture was almost non-existent while in the other areas (al-Ṭā'if and Madīnah) the lands were suitable for just that and the settlers engaged in extensive farming.

He underlines the status of Makkah as a nerve centre for commerce and also its favourable geographical locus. In addition, he stresses the city's prominence as a financial centre of the age with many eminent residents being

> ... financiers and skilful in the manipulation of credit, shrewd in their speculations, and interested in any potentialities of lucrative investment from Aden to Gaza or Damascus.[279]

The Qur'ān, therefore, he reasons

> ... appeared not in an atmosphere of the desert, but in that of high finance.[280]

He raises the question of whether the birth of Islam and its later expansion into other parts of the world especially Persia, Syria, and North Africa had anything to do with some economic upheavals in the Hijāz. He however discounts any plausible economic explanation to this arguing that despite all the conquests, the Hijāz settlers almost always returned to their native land, suggesting the place was still 'peaceful' and attractive.[281]

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279 Mecca, p. 3.

280 Ibid.

281 The economic background of the Hijaz and its concomitant effects on early Islam has been examined in the other works of Watt.
See his: 'Economic and Social Aspects of the Origin of Islam' in IQ Vol. 1 No. 2, (July 1954), pp. 90-103 and the 'Ideal Factors in the Origin of Islam' in IQ Vol. II No. 3, (Oct. 1955), pp. 160-174
See also: Crone, Patricia: Meccan Trade and The Rise of Islam, (Princeton (N.J.): Princeton University Press, 1987)
Simon, Robert: Meccan Trade and Islam - Problems of Origin and Structure, translated by Feodora Sos, (Budapest, A Kademiai Kiado, 1989) and

The second issue to be looked at under the environmental factors is the political climate in Makkah at the time. Despite the suspicion that many Western scholars have against the accounts of the Arabic sources with respect to the political arrangements and tribal bickering in Arabia at the advent of Islam, Watt takes a positive stance and accepts these accounts as largely dependable. He admits that extreme hostile relationships between the Abbassids and the Umayyads for example might have had some telling effects on later historical narratives but he does not believe that these in themselves are damaging enough to the whole spectrum of the history of the period.

He examines the 'extreme antiquity' of Makkah mentioning the various clans whose powers used to hold sway in the political structure of ancient Arabia. He relies on al-Mas'ūdī, Ibn Hishām, Ibn Isḥāq and al-Ṭabarī in his analysis of the thorny relationships amongst the clans with the resultant effect of strengthening some while weakening others.

He points out that Leo Caetani's opinion that the Ḥilf al-fuḍūl was a general alliance to fight injustice and oppression does not seem to be supported by the material available.[282]

Watt interprets what he thinks were the various groupings and political alliances at play before the advent of Muḥammad.[283] He, as usual, assigns reasons for his understanding.

In terms of the wielding of authority in Makkah, he sees the rather low-key consultative council of chiefs and elders (*The Mala'*), who technically had no executive powers, as the one having that power. He points out that

> ... the boycott of the clans of Hāshim and al-Muṭṭalib is an example of how economic and social pressure could be brought to bear.[284]

Peters, F.E.: Muḥammad and the Origins of Islam, (Albany, State University of New York Press, 1994), see esp. Chapt. 3 'The Arabian Oikoumene'.

282 Watt, Mecca, p. 6.
cf. Caetani, L., Annali dell'Islam Vol. 1, (Milan 1905), pp. 164-166.

283 Mecca, pp. 6-8.

284 Ibid., p. 8.

Reference is also made to smaller office holders in the intricate arrangement in Makkah. The notable among these are the office of the *Siqāyah* which oversees water - supply facilities especially for the benefit of pilgrims, the *Rifādah* taking care of arrangements for pilgrims, and the *Liwa'* - the office in charge of keeping the banners and flags during battle. All these offices, however obscure their influence, had significant behind-the-scenes impact on the political arrangement in Makkah.

Watt goes on to identify two main factors as responsible for a person's influence and status in the Makkan society, namely

> ... his clan and his personal qualifications.[285]

He finds a way of comparing the Makkan institution of *Mala'* with the Athenian arrangement of *ekklesia* and pronounces the former a

> ... much wiser and more responsible body ...

because

> ... its decisions were more often made on the solid merit of men and their policies and not on specious rhetoric that could make the worse appear the better cause.[286]

He however notes a significant difference between the two bodies pointing out that in the Athenian philosophy, honesty and uprightness were the main principles for honourability while in the Makkan situation, the more pressing elements were practical skills and efficient leadership qualities.[287]

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285 Ibid., p. 9.
It is worth noting that wealth was also an important element in the estimation of a person's status.

286 Ibid.

287 Vide Ibid., pp. 9-10.

In the next discussion focusing on the status of the Quraysh as compared to the other tribes, Watt argues that even though some justification could be made of the Qurayshī authority as derived from superior military strength, the suggestions by Lammens that this was achieved because of the employment of black slaves are not convincing. He is of the opinion rather, that the Qurayshī eminence did not derive from

> ... their military prowess as individuals. The secret of their prestige was the military strength they could bring to bear on any opponent. This was not their own military strength, but that of a whole confederacy. This confederacy they had built up on the basis of their mercantile enterprises.[288]

He attributes the success of the Quraysh instead to their political wisdom and skilful display of statesmanship which, in Makkan society, as he argues in his comparison of Athenian *ekklesia* and Arab *Mala'*, were crucial in determining one's honour.

The chapter's attention then shifts onto the foreign policy of Makkah and the scholar notes that the city was sandwiched between two major powers of the then known world, Byzantine and Persian empires, and also to some extent the Abyssinians.

Makkah was important because it offered an alternative trade route to the Byzantines since the Persians, taking advantage of their opportune geographical locus, were creating serious problems for them in their trade with the outside world especially China, India and Ceylon. In peace times the Persians exacted astronomical tariffs on trading and, of course, in war times trading activities were seriously affected. Makkah was the most appropriate route left and hence its jealous significance.

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288 Ibid., p. 10.
It is to support his interpretation of events that he presents an addendum entitled 'The Ahabish' focusing on this 'Black-slave mercernaries' theory of Lammens.
See: Excursus A, Ibid., pp. 154-157.

Hence, he notes, the Byzantines, in the early and mid-sixth century, made some sort of arrangements with the Abyssinians which enabled them to have some indirect influence on South Arabia, a position which of course changed during the Persian conquest in the latter part of that century. In this struggle between the superpowers of the day, Makkah was relatively unaffected and hence was making significant gains and this culminated in the attempt by Arabia to destroy the Ka'bah in order to re-focus attention on the shrine in Sana'a in Yemen in the south. In his understanding of the traditional accounts, Watt says that the

> ... expedition came to nothing as the Abyssinian army was destroyed, apparently by plague.[289]

Watt refrains from explaining his understanding of the events in the Year of the Elephant in the face of traditional accounts which are often based on Qur'ānic references.[290]

He however provides room for the student to see his honesty and pragmatism. In the analysis dealing with very intricate issues, he admits that he could not be absolutely right. He acknowledges:

> Owing to the scantiness of our materials there is much in this account of Meccan policies that is conjectural.[291]

However, he insists that

> ... even if many of the details are incorrect, the general picture is, I believe sound. Muḥammad grew to maturity in a world in which high finance and international politics were inextricably mixed up.[292]

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289 Ibid., p. 14.
290 Vide, Sūrah al-Fīl 105:1-5.
291 Mecca, p. 16.
292 Ibid.

This attitude of preparedness to admit the fact that one's own interpretation does not in itself constitute the 'real' or 'only' basis for scholarly understanding of events is indicative of Watt's probity as a seasoned academic.

The third issue in the background discussion has to do with social and moral factors. Watt notes the importance of the tribe in the conditions as were existent in Arabia at the time of Muḥammad. He however reminds the reader that the tribal units are themselves not absolute and they could break up into sub-units or even disappear and in the case of Makkah, animosities were very rife. That is why there was the need for strong bonds amongst tribal members or those of a particular unit. The language that was best understood was hence based on force and within the circumstances, that was found to be the most expedient to keep law and order. The principle of *Lex Talionis* might be repugnant to our age but in that scenario there was perhaps no better alternative.[293] Despite the pervasive consciousness of tribal solidarity, there was a carefully woven unity underneath in which all these apparent diverse groups were welded together by the force of

> ... a common language (though with variations in dialect), a common poetical tradition, some common conventions and ideas, and a common descent.[294]

Watt argues, with some justification that the strong tribal solidarity among the Arabs at least those in Makkah was responsible for the relative ability of Muḥammad to preach in Makkah in the first place. Despite the problems he encountered later, he says, it was because of

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293 Ibid., p. 17.
It is perhaps significant to note that lex talionis and feuding in traditional societies are considered by social anthropologists as significant factors for social and political stability and security.

294 Ibid., p. 18.

Muḥammad's tribal unit, the Banū Hāshim, and his being a Quraysh that his enemies found it rather too risky to attack him personally for fear of retribution.

Nevertheless, he reminds us that tribal solidarity was not cast in iron. The Arab loved and cherished his individual freedom. In fact, as Philip Hitti puts it,

> The Arabian in general and the Bedouin in particular, is a born democrat. He meets his sheikh on an equal footing.[295]

Watt stresses that

> The members of the tribe were not automatons, but human beings prone to selfishness - or what Lammens calls 'individualisme'; it would only be natural if sometimes they put private interests above those of the tribe.... While tribal solidarity continued to govern the actions of the best people, yet a certain individualism began to make its appearance in their thinking....[296]

He again assigns the circumstances of mercantile society to the individualistic tendencies amongst some of the Makkans. He refers to business alliances which sometimes did not respect tribal or clan boundaries and mentions also that Abū Lahab for example took a different stance with regard to Muḥammad as against other members of the Banū Hāshim due to palpable economic reasons. He then asserts that these economic exigencies of the time had what he calls a 'correlation' with the genesis of Islam.

However, he quickly tries to make a distinction between this assertion and

> ... the absolute dependence of religion and ideology on economic factors as maintained by the Marxist.[297]

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295 Vide, The Arabs - A Short History, (London etc.: Macmillan, 1968), p. 15. The statement might be described as a romantic exaggeration but it gives us a further glimpse of the traditional Arab society.

296 Mecca, pp. 18-19.

297 Ibid., p. 19.

The discourse moves onto the moral ideals in the background debate and refers to the basis of Arab moral ideal as based on *murūwah* or manliness, the terminology which was the favourite of Goldziher. It is this which R.A. Nicholson is cited to have explained as

> ... bravery in battle, patience in misfortune, persistence in revenge, protection of the weak, defiance of the strong.[298]

The basic moral values as understood by the Arabs are discussed. Principles such as generosity and hospitality bordering on profligacy, loyalty and fidelity of some sort and general heroism are some of those mentioned.[299] Perhaps it is from this basic rationale that the succession by primogeniture was markedly absent. Watt says this was the case

> ... for obvious reasons; if the eldest son of a chief was inexperienced when his father died (as would frequently happen), the tribe could not jeopardize its very existence by having such a man as leader. The chief must be a man of wisdom and sound judgement, and so was usually the most respected male in the family.[300]

On the Religious and Intellectual setting, the discussion is based on three assumptions that: the existent religion had become decadent and archaic, there was in vogue what could be described as 'tribal humanism' and that shadows of monotheism were on the horizon.

On the first point, Watt refers to the works of T. Noldeke, J. Welhausen and H. Lammens, each of them touching on ancient Arabia and its religious vestiges. They describe the 'pagan' ways of belief in operation before the advent of Muḥammad.

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298 Ibid., p. 20.
Vide: Nicholson, R.A., A Literary History of the Arabs,(Cambridg:, Cambridge University Press, 1953), pp. 82-85, 178-179.

299 Mecca, pp. 20-22.

300 Ibid., p. 22.

Watt however makes it clear that since material in this area is scrappy and perhaps more importantly, to his theory, derived from Islamic sources

> ... there is ample scope for conjecture.[301]

Perhaps it is primarily this conjectural attitude which prevents the writer from venturing into a deeper discussion on their religion.

'Tribal Humanism' which Watt sees as the other considered alternative and calls the

> ... effective religion of the Arabs[302]

was also waning in its impact just as was the worship of cosmic objects, trees, stones and other aspects of nature.

He describes 'tribal humanism' as the religion one detects from the poets for whom

> ... the realization of human excellence in action is an end in itself, and at the same time usually contributes to the survival of the tribe, which is the other great end of life. This is humanism in the sense that it is primarily in human values, in virtuous or manly conduct, that it finds significance.[303]

Again, he is at pains to differentiate this type from contemporary humanist philosophy. The cardinal difference here, he points out, is that the focus in the Arab belief is the tribe while in modern humanism the individualism becomes the centre of orientation.

The deliberation touches on the concept of fate in the Arab society where the perception was not total fatalism but a limited one.

As he had already argued in his own Ph.D. thesis which was later published under the title Freewill and Predestination in Early Islam,[304] Watt reiterates that this limited fatalism was,

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301 Ibid., p. 23.
302 Ibid., p. 24.
303 Ibid.

among other things, carried over into Islam. At the advent of Muḥammad, this perception of the immortality of the tribe had tapered off almost into oblivion. Individualism held sway but, as he indicates, the shift of axis did not create a new 'religion' since, even though tribal humanism itself did have some form of religious belief behind it, the Arabs did not have a clear concept of individual immortality. He argues that this made a transfer of the idea impossible.

Watt begins the discussion on the last part of this section with a criticism of the communis opinio in Western scholarship regarding the Judaeo-Christian roots of Islam. He notes that despite the discussion of this theory ad nauseam, it is basically flawed because it intrinsically denies the authentic independent theological roots of Islamic tenets. He writes:

> Even from the standpoint of the best Western scholarship the Western studies on the Qur'an have often been unfortunate. They have made a fetish of literary dependence and have forgotten that literary dependence is never more than one side of the picture; there is also the Creative work of the poet, or dramatist, or novelist; and the fact of literary dependence never proves the absence of creative originality.[305]

Comparing the religious domain to this, he points out that too much stress on a religious personality's dependence on the environmental influences per se would seriously diminish the opportunity of appreciating

> ... the originality and the uniqueness of the Divine revelation[306]

at play.

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304 Published in London in 1949.
See p. 25 and passim.

305 Mecca, pp. 25-26.

306 Ibid.
cf. Andrae, T., Muhammad-The Man and His Faith, esp. pp. 10-12 and also Chpt. 4.

Yet, he goes on to assert that even though Muslims generally hold the Qur'ān to be the divinely revealed word of God, internal evidence suggests the influence of Judaeo-Christian ideas.

He notes the existence in pre-Islamic religious culture and diction the use of *al-ilāh* which he claims was transposed into Allah by Muḥammad. He however does not think that *al-ilāh* in the Makkan consciousness had any monotheistic originality in itself. The later monotheistic interpretation, he asserts, was supplied by Juadeo-Christian influences. The issue is of such importance to him that he devoted one of the addenda to it titling it 'Arabian Monotheism and Judaeo-Christian Influences'.[307]

In this article in the *Excursus*, he argues strenuously that the assumption that

> ... there was no monotheism among the Arabs to whom Muḥammad preached ... is unsound.[308]

He refers to the works of Nicholson, Margoliouth, Torrey and Jeffery to support his reasoning.[309] Watt's thesis boils down to the statement:

> Thus sound scholarship as well as the theological impartiality of the historian suggests that the chief question to be asked in this field is the extent of Jewish and Christian (and perhaps other) influences upon the Mecca of AD 600, not upon Muhammad himself, or rather upon the Qur'ān; and to this question the answer can be neither simple nor absolutely certain.[310]

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307 Mecca, see Excursus B, pp. 158-164.

308 Ibid., p. 158.

309 Vide, Margoliouth, D.S., 'The Origins of Arabic Poetry' in (JRAS), 1925, pp. 417-449, esp. p. 434ff.
Nicholson, R.A., A Literary History, p. 139ff.
Torrey, C.C., The Jewish Foundation of Islam esp. pp. 33, 48, 50-54, 71, 76.
Jeffery, A., The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'an, (Baroda, 1938), esp. p. 10.

310 Mecca, pp. 158-159.

The scholar himself does not totally discount the view of some influence because he thinks that some rumours about and from Jews and Christians and other peoples could certainly have reached Muḥammad and he could have made use of the information so gathered.

Granted that this reasoning is correct, Watt still does depend solely on this to assess the originality of the doctrines of Islam. He revives his original line of thinking thus:

> There is no great difficulty in claiming that the precise form, the point and ulterior significance of the stories came to Muḥammad by revelation and not from the communications of his alleged informant.[311]

Even though he reasons that Muḥammad and the early Muslims wanted to learn more about the earlier prophets from the Jews and Christians around, he maintains that

> ... before this interest in the prophets arose, the essential message of the Qur'ān had been proclaimed....[312]

It is also reasonable to assume that the intense superpower politics in action between the Byzantines and the Persians could have resulted in contacts which went beyond mere military or trade encounters. In both empires and that of the Byzantine surrogates the Abyssinians, Christianity was strong and hence the influence from this direction on the Arabs cannot be intelligently denied.[313]

As for the types of Christianity or Judaism the Arabs were influenced by, Watt is content to sum up his ideas in the statement that those Christian and Jewish denominations

> ... must have had many strange ideas.[314]

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311 Ibid., p. 160.
312 Ibid.
313 See Rodinson, 'A Critical Survey', p. 25.
314 Mecca, p. 27.
See also his article 'The Christianity Criticised in the Qur'ān' in MW LVII, No. 3, (July)1967, pp.197-201.

Here, Watt's concern has to do with the severe critique of the Qur'ān of particular ideas supposedly by Jews and Christians of that era.

The analysis of Watt is most significant because it is a general departure from the rather dominant arguments which seem to establish that Muḥammad did not seem to have original ideas of his own.[315]

EARLY LIFE OF MUḤAMMAD

Every writer on the biography of Muḥammad has been concerned with his early life and the discussion often delves into his descent often with varied objectives. Watt for example identifies what he thinks to be a significant question regarding the pedigree of Muḥammad. He writes

> The chief question to be considered in a life of Muhammad is whether his ancestors were as important in the politics of Mecca as the sources suggest, or whether (as some Western scholars have thought) their importance has been exaggerated.[316]

In whichever way one looks at it, one with a hidden agenda would be able to find room to reach a conclusion which might not necessarily be in accordance with sound scholarship.

Watt seems to have a theory at the back of his mind when he suggests that the extant material seems to have given prominence to the generation of Hāshim over and against that of

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315 Vide, Bell, R, The Origins of Islam in it Christian Environment, (London, 1926), passim
Guillaume, A: Islam, esp. p. 30
Torrey, The Jewish Foundation of Islam, passim
Rosenthal, F., 'The Influence of the Biblical Tradition on Muslim Historiography' in Lewis and Holt (eds.), The Historians of the Middle East, pp. 35-45
and Papathanassiou, A.N. 'Christian Missions in Pre-Islamic South Arabia' in Theologica, Vol. LXV (1994), Issue 'A', pp. 133-140.

316 Mecca, p. 30.

'Abd Shams since the scholars were under the heavy influence of Abbasid political intrigue. He however does not give much weight to the leverage which was applied. He notes that

> ... there are no grounds for supposing serious falsification or large-scale invention.[317]

The crucial issue at stake in this argument is not merely the level of influence but essentially how this could have a negative effect on the whole spectrum of historicity of Muḥammad's life. In his summation, Watt is of the opinion that even though Muḥammad's family was once prominent in Makkan society, by the time he appeared on the scene that prominence had certainly declined somehow.[318]

Touching on his birth Watt seems to express some doubt about Muḥammad being born posthumously by saying this was a presumption.[319]

He states very basic facts about the early childhood days and adds a footnote that as far as the secular historian is concerned these are the only relevant facts of interest even though, even with these, there have been some doubts raised. He then refers to a large mass of material which are theological in character as far as the secular historian is concerned and hence of significance only to the believer. Watt himself writes that

> It is almost certain that they are not true in the realistic sense of the secular historian, for they purport to describe facts to which we might reasonably have expected some reference at later periods of Muḥammad's life; but there is no such reference.[320]

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317 Ibid.
318 Ibid., pp. 32-33.
319 Ibid., p. 33.
320 Ibid., pp. 33-34

He then cites a lengthy passage from Ibn Isḥāq detailing some of the narratives from Ḥalīmah, Āminah herself and other events which border on the miraculous and which then explains why the secular historian might find it ahistorical.[321]

He next looks at Muḥammad's marriage to Khadījah and immediately expresses doubt saying that her age at the time of marriage

> ... has perhaps been exaggerated.[322]

His argument is simply that granted that the seven children Khadījah had with Muḥammad were born at yearly intervals, the last might have been born when she was about forty eight years old. He expresses disquiet with this and argues that even though

> This is by no means impossible,... one would have thought it sufficiently unusual to merit comment; it is even the sort of thing that might well have been treated as miraculous. Yet no single word of comment occurs in the pages of Ibn Hishām, Ibn Sa'd, or al-Ṭabarī.[323]

Again, he doubts whether Khadījah was that woman of substance as the traditional accounts portray her to be.

In his efforts to find material for the early marriage life of prophethood, Watt says he draws a blank and therefore the only option left for him is to deduce from passages of the Qur'ān and here, he falls on the ninety-third Sūrah where references are made to Muḥammad's past.[324]

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321 Ibid., pp. 34-38.
322 Ibid., p. 38.
323 Ibid.
324 See, Sūrah al-Ḍuḥā 93:6-8.

THE CALL TO PROPHETHOOD

He offers the stage by stage account in the work of al-Zuhrī and examines what he considers some inconsistencies in the various reports.

He casts doubt on the interpretation given to the early visions of Muḥammad which involves the angel Gabriel and asserts that Muḥammad might have thought that he saw God himself. Acknowledging that this does not agree with the Muslim understanding of the nature of God, he reasons that the position is reinforced by the fact that Gabriel does not appear in the verses revealed in Makkah until the Madīnan period. He points out that

> The formal interpretation of the vision, however, is not so important from the standpoint of the life of Muhammad as the significance of it for his religious development.[325]

Referring to the practice of retreat - *Tahannuth* - in the cave of Ḥirā, Watt is sceptical of the standard account that the first encounter with the angel Gabriel happened here assuming that

> ... the comparative dates of the different features of Muhammad's call are uncertain.[326]

On the visit to Waraqah by Muḥammad with Khadījah, Watt does not find it expedient to doubt it. He reasons that the incident shows how desperate Muḥammad was to boost his self-confidence after the initial experience in the cave and therefore it could not have been fabricated.[327]

Probably, precisely because of this, Watt goes on to lay down a theory that the expression in the first revelation in Sūrah al-ʿAlaq concerning the 'teaching of the pen' might

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325 Mecca, p. 43.
326 Ibid., p. 44.
327 Ibid., p. 51.

have reminded Muḥammad of his indebtedness to Waraqah. From this therefore, he concludes that

> ... Muḥammad had frequent communication with Waraqah at an earlier date, and learnt much of a general character. Later Islamic concepts may have been largely moulded by Waraqah's ideas, e.g., of the relation of Muḥammad's revelation to previous revelations.[328]

He is of course, aware that this is a mere assumption since there is no evidence that Muḥammad met Waraqah before the incident connected with the first encounter in the cave of Ḥirā. The assumption itself is interesting after noting that Waraqah might have died about three or four years after the incident.[329]

Discussing the Western appreciation of the form of Muḥammad's prophetic consciousness, Watt reiterates his view that the picture has generally been unfavourable. He points out that

> Western writers have mostly been prone to believe the worst of Muḥammad, and, where an objectionable interpretation of an act seemed plausible, have tended to accept it as fact.[330]

He insists that plausibility in itself is not a strong criterion to judge a particular case and hence it is important that a solid, sound evidence needs to be presented as the basis for assessing the prophet. He writes:

> Thus, not merely must we credit Muhammad with essential honesty and integrity of purpose, if we are to understand him at all; if we are to correct the errors we have inherited from the past, we must in every particular case hold firmly to the belief in his sincerity until the opposite is conclusively proved;...[331]

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328 Ibid., pp. 51-52.
329 Ibid., p. 51.
330 Ibid., p. 52.
331 Ibid.

He goes on therefore to argue that one cannot sustain the view that Muḥammad interposed his own views into the revealed text. Yet, he believes the Prophet

> ... may have tried to induce emending revelations where he felt that a passage required emendation - it is part of orthodox Muslim theory that some revelations were abrogated by others.[332]

The discussion attempts to look at the nature of the Qur'ān in relation to Muḥammad's own psyche. He mentions the opinions of Muslim orthodoxy, secular scholarship and a third stance generally shared by some Christian scholars of Islam.

The first opinion is of the divinity of the Qur'ān (its divine origin), the second discounting the Divine origin and focusing on Muḥammad's personality as the source of the Qur'ān. The third opinion allows room for divine involvement but sees Muḥammad's personality as being an influential factor in the 'formation' of the Qur'ān.

Watt claims that as a historian he does not lean on any of these theories and endeavours to be dispassionate.[333]

With this, he launches an investigation into the nature of the revelation which Muhammad received and, relying on A. Poulain's The Graces of Interior Prayer, identifies two main forms of encountering religious experience as it occurred to Muḥammad - 'Locutions' and 'Visions'. He explains that in 'locution' the messages are

> ... 'received directly without the assistance of the ear; they can be said to be received by the imaginative sense;' ...

while in visions, there is

> ... 'a simple communication of thought without words, and consequently without any definite language'.[334]

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[332] Ibid., p. 53.
[333] Ibid.

Looking at the opinions of al-Suyūṭī and others, he finds that these two forms could be identified with the experience of Muḥammad. He is of the opinion that the traditional accounts as to the various forms through which the revelation came to Muḥammad are largely acceptable. Therefore, he points out that

> To assert that Muḥammad's visions and locutions are hallucinations as has sometimes been done, is to make theological judgements without being fully aware of what one is doing, and thereby to show a woeful ignorance of the science and sanity of writers like Poulain and the discipline of mystical theology which they represent.[335]

He explains further that the main point is not the question of authenticity of the revelations but the fact that the revealed word and Muḥammad's own thoughts could be distinguished. Watt then touches on the pathology theory where Muḥammad was thought to being epileptic. He repudiates the theory on the basic grounds that none of the medical symptoms associated with this condition were present in Muḥammad. Further, he argues, even if it were the case,

> ... the argument would be completely unsound and based on mere ignorance and prejudice; such physical concomitants neither validate or invalidate religious experience.[336]

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334 Ibid., p. 54.

335 Ibid., p. 57.

336 Ibid.
With respect to this, the reader is referred to the interesting study of J.C. Archer: Mystical Elements in Mohammed, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1924).
See especially the summary (p. 87) where Archer thinks that Muḥammad practised 'self-hypnotism' to induce the events which came to him. Yet, he also states that this

> "... did not in the least affect their character as the means of God's revelation to his chosen prophet".

THE BASIC TEACHINGS OF MUḤAMMAD AND THE CONTEMPORARY SITUATION

This theme occupies the third chapter of the book. Starting with the question as to the original teaching presented by Muḥammad, Watt says that even though the Muslim accounts could be relied upon there are problems which cannot be solved from the available material because of what he claims to be inconsistencies and contradictions. Hence, to the Western scholar, many issues remain. Unsolved unless of course, some reconstruction is resorted to. Most of the unsolved problems have to do with chronology of the revealed passages. Attempts by Noldeke and Bell have hence been made to reorganize the Qur'ānic material to suit the Western quest for chronology. Watt tries himself to introduce a paradigm which he thinks helps in solving the problem. His principle is basically that he identifies all passages which reflect opposition to be late Makkan, since, as he argues

> ... before opposition could arise some message which tended to arouse opposition must have been proclaimed.[337]

He hence indicates that as far as the early passages are concerned they must have concentrated on subjects like 'God's goodness and Power', 'The return to God for Judgement'; 'Man's response - gratitude and worship, generosity and purification'; and 'Muḥammad's own vocation'. In all these, he specifies verses which, he thinks, fits his paradigm.[338]

Again, Watt discusses the social, moral, religious and intellectual significance of Muḥammad's message in the then environment underlining the kind of transformation it sought to initiate.[339]

The rest of the chapter is devoted to general comments which centre on two main parts - economic conditions and viability of religion, and the originality of the Qur'ān.

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337 Mecca, p. 61.
338 Ibid., pp. 62-72.
339 Ibid., pp. 72-79.

Watt revisits the economic argument stating that the economic environment of Makkah at the period of Muḥammad is very significant in a fuller understanding of Muḥammad. He argues that the economic conditions of Makkah created an individualistic philosophy and hence the society was in need of a balance to hold it up and that moral and religious balance came in the form of Islam. He is of the opinion that the manifest needs of the society boil down primarily to the religious and hence, in a way, the society was ripe for Islam.[340]

As for the originality of the Qur'ānic message Watt writes:

> The secularist would have to say that it was by chance and for secondary reasons that Muhammad stumbled across ideas that held the key to the solution of the fundamental problems of his day; and that is not plausible. Neither empirical grouping nor hard and acute thinking adequately account for the Qur'ānic kerygma.[341]

He endeavours to steer a middle course between this secularist position and the Muslim belief that the Qur'ān was a divine intervention in the world with Makkah becoming a mere cradle. He emphasises that his position does not discount the fact that the Qur'ān had a particular significance for the Makkan milieu. He refers to certain relevant issues which could only be understood by the Makkans.[342]

He illustrates with an example of the Qur'ānic critique of usury and asks rather rhetorically why the issue of usury was not mentioned in the Makkan passages since Makkah, with its elaborate financial system should have been the starting point. However, he answers himself by noting that the situation in Makkah was such that the message of usury could not have been effectively conveyed and hence it was more sensible for the issue to be raised in the Madīnan period.[343]

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340 Ibid., p. 80.
341 Ibid., pp. 80-81.
342 See Ibid., p. 81.

Watt again attempts to look at the relation of the Qur'ān to the Judaeo-Christian teachings in existence at the time. Trying to create an analogy between this and the 'sources' for the plot of Hamlet of Shakespeare, he recognizes the inherent danger and abandons the exercise. He then curiously says

> This latter conception, however, is contrary to the beliefs of Orthodox Muslims, and therefore to be avoided.[344]

This is a rather remarkable statement because all along the impression one gathers is that Watt sticks to historical scholarship without necessarily agreeing with what Muslims believe. This apparent contradictory rationale will be taken up in the conclusion and attempts made to point out which of the two is dominant in his analysis.

Yet Watt goes ahead to argue that many fundamental ideas of the Qur'ān were already in the public knowledge in Makkah and the main thing done was to 'Arabize' these old existent 'Judaeo-Christian ideas' to make them more relevant to the Arabs since only an Arab could have made these 'ideas' relevant to his tribesmen.[345]

The reasoning on its face-value is not very different from the Muslim scholarly position - where it is emphasised that the essential message of the Qur'ān is dissimilar to what has already been revealed to others. After all, the Qur'ān recognizes itself as a 'Reminder' and a 'Confirmation' of the earlier message.[346]

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343 Ibid.
The traditional argument that the message of the Qur'ān was graded to allow for human capability to bear and absorb it could be stated here.

344 Ibid., p. 83.

345 Ibid.

346 See The Holy Qur'ān e.g.: 2:87; 7:63; 11:17; 12:104; 18:101; 20:3, 99, 124; 25:29; 36:11, 69; 43:44; 65:10; 72:17.

Watt observes that the 'originality' of the Qur'an vis-a-vis these 'ideas'

> ... consists in that it gave them greater precision and detail, presented them more forcefully, and, by its varying emphasis, made a more or less coherent synthesis of them; above all, it gave them a focus in the person of Muhammad and his special vocation as a messenger of God.[347]

A problem is identified here, in this discussion on originality, that, in the case of what Watt calls 'illustrative material, like the stories of the prophets', wide discrepancies between the Judaeo-Christian views and the Qur'anic views are detected. Often, the argument has been that the Qur'anic views agree more with what the Jews and Christians would call non-canonical or apocryphal works. The conclusion has therefore almost always been that Muhammad merely heard these heretical stories from the society and uncritically 'adopted' them into 'his Qur'an'.[348]

THE SATANIC VERSES [348a]

The 'satanic verses' is one of the favourite themes of Watt in chapter four and he spends ten good pages on it. Looking at it from the context of the beginning of opposition he divides the discussion into three. In the first section he considers a letter cited from al-Ṭabarī written by 'Urwah b. az-Zubayr, the second looks at 'The Satanic Verses, the facts' and the last focuses on what he calls motives and explanations for the Satanic Verses.

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[347] Mecca, pp. 83-84.

[348] Ibid., p. 84.

[348a] For further reading on this subject see:

Ahsan, M.M.: 'The Qur'an and the Orientalists. A note on the authenticity of the so-called Satanic Verses' in IQ, XXIV, Nos. 3 & 4, (1980), pp. 89-95;

Ahsan, M.M. and Kidwai, A.R. (eds.) : Sacrilege Versus Civility. Muslim Perspectives on The Satanic Verses Affair, (Leicester, The Islamic Foundation, 1991);

Mawdudi, S.A.A.: Tafhīm al-Qur'ān Vol. III, (Lahore, 1972), pp. 238-245;

Haykul, M.H.: The Life of Muhammad, trans. from the 8th. ed. by Ismail R. Al-Faruqi, (Indianapolis, North American Trust Publications, 1976);

Qutb, Sayyid: Fī zilāl al-Qur'ān, Vol. IV, (Beirut, 1974), pp. 2431-2433.

'Urwah's letter refers to the beginning of preaching, the eruption of opposition, the involvement of certain prominent personalities in al-Taif and the eventual migration of part of the Nascent community of Abyssinia. Watt's analysis of the satanic verses is thus based partly on this letter.

On the 'facts' of the satanic verses, he claims that

> The most notable mention of idols in the Meccan part of the Qur'an is in Surat al-Najm (53), and thereby hangs a tale.[349]

He recounts the versions of the tale as they exist in al-Ṭabarī and comments on them. His conclusions rest on two main issues. He suggests that the story could certainly be true because there is no reason to assume that it was invented by Muḥammad's enemies and also that since the tales say that the actual expressions were abrogated it means the incident actually occurred. He writes:

> Firstly, at one time Muhammad must have publicly recited the satanic verses as part of the Qur'an; it is unthinkable that the story could have been invented later by Muslims or foisted upon them by non-Muslims. Secondly, at some later time Muhammad announced that these verses were not really part of the Qur'an and should be replaced by others of a vastly different import. The earliest versions do not specify how long afterwards this happened; the probability is that it was weeks or even months.[350]

In his attempt to look for the motives and the explanations, Watt is of the opinion that Muslim scholars, without the sophistication of their Western contemporaries made a mistake of assuming that the concept of monotheism was fully clear to the prophet right from the

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349 Mecca, p. 101
The expression "hangs a tale" seems to suggest that Watt takes a particular view of the issue. One wonders why Watt thinks the expressions in Sūrah al-Najm are of particular significance.

350 Ibid., p. 103.

beginning. Hence, he goes on to assert, rather condescendingly, that the satanic verses cannot be explained effectively. Claiming to have a better insight into Muḥammad's prophethood, Watt then says:

> The truth rather is that his monotheism was originally, like that of his more enlightened contemporaries, somewhat vague, and in particular was not so strict that the recognition of inferior divine beings was felt to be incompatible with it.[351]

For Watt, the message of the 'satanic verses' is indicative of

> ... views which Muhammad had always held.[352]

He goes on assigning some rationale for the 'satanic verses' and what Muhammad might have thought to gain out of making such a statement. He assumes that the prophet was probably trying to seek a closer alliance with the Quraishī elites and thought this concession would have done the trick. Or, he again asserts, the prophet wanted to reach out to the wider community and hence felt that by mentioning these popular deities in such important places his own self-image would be heightened. He even attributes material gains to Muḥammad's 'recognition' of these deities.

He insists that

> The promulgation of the satanic verses is doubtless to be linked up with this bargain.[353]

In the whole discussion one discerns Watt's argument that Muḥammad's views on the oneness of God was a gradual development and at various points in time, he felt pressured to offer some acknowledgement to idolatry, which he did with the satanic verses episode.

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351 Ibid., p. 104.
352 Ibid.
353 Ibid., p. 105.

However, the argument further suggests, when he detected that the compromise would deal a fatal blow to his whole ideology, he recanted his statement and brought in more forceful anti-idolatry statements.[354]

OPPOSITION AND PERSECUTION

Looking at the reasons why some of the early Muslims emigrated to Abyssinia, Watt finds the argument of persecution not convincing. He reasons that the main opponents of the prophet came from the Makhzūm and the 'Abd Shams units and hence if anything at all, the pressure on converts would be directed to members of these clans.

In his reading of the list of people who left for Abyssinia as given by ibn Ishaq, Watt notes the reference to the fact that members belonged to groups other than the two mentioned above who were the high finance people. To him, therefore, it does not make sense that others who possibly did not face persecution had to emigrate.[355]

He then asks

> If the Muslims went to Abyssinia merely to avoid persecution, why did some of them remain there until A.H. 7, when they could safely have rejoined Muhammad in Medina?[356]

He asserts that there is possibly a reason which is of a higher importance but avoided. A second assumed reason ostensibly made by Western scholars is stated but immediately discounted as not being viable. It is suggested that Muḥammad sent these people to Abyssinia to avoid a possible relapse into idolatry. Watt, rejecting this view points out that there are no grounds to believe that Muḥammad could have promised them a safer Makkah soon.[357]

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354 Ibid., pp. 104-109.
355 Ibid., p. 113.
356 Ibid.
357 Ibid., p. 114.

Another assumed reason is that they went there purposely for trade; but this also Watt says is not acceptable because Muḥammad was more preoccupied with religious reform than mere trade.

The analysis now shifts onto reasons for military help from the Abyssinians, making Abyssinia a Muslim base to invade Makkah later or to form an alliance with Abyssinia to destroy the Makkan monopolistic hold on trade. Referring to the Makkans sent to seek their repatriation, he notes there might have been economic and political objectives.

> But the precise nature of the mission and its result must remain a matter for conjecture.[358]

Watt finds a motive which he finds irresistible and that has to do with an alleged dissent within early Islam. He claims that 'Uthmān b. Maz'ūn who Ibn Hishām identifies as the leader of the early group that went to Abyssinia led a dissenting group within the Muslims. He mentions one Khālid b. Sa'īd from the 'Abd Shams who was also of a similar inclination. This Khalid also emigrated. These people, and others mentioned were allegedly opposed to the prominent position of Abū Bakr. Watt therefore assumes that the emigration was due to this factionalism in early Islam. He writes, for example:

> It is in accordance with Muhammad's character that he should quickly have become aware of the incipient schism and taken steps to heal it by suggesting the journey to Abyssinia in furtherance of some plan to promote the interest of Islam, of whose precise nature we remain unaware since in its ostensible aim it met with little success.[359]

As far as the details of the persecution are concerned, Watt plays down the severity and looks at them as being exaggerated. Resting on the theory that tribal security in Makkah was

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358 Ibid., p. 115.
359 Ibid., p. 117.

very strong and nobody who belonged to a tribe could have been freely attacked or molested, he concludes that

> The persecution of the Muslims was thus mostly of a mild nature.[360]

He discusses the boycott of the b. Hāshim but is of the view that the matter could not have been strictly enforced as traditional accounts say because after all these were inter-marriages amongst the members of the clans involved. Watt reduces the most severe persecutions to mere verbal criticisms of the Qur'ānic message and also of the prophethood of Muḥammad. He acknowledges that there were schemes and plots against the prophet and the Muslims but insists that there was

> ... hardly ... anything that really merits the name of persecution.[361]

Despite the fact that he does not approve of reliance on the Qur'ān for historical facts, in this particular discussion, he dwells on Qur'ānic references following the methodology of Caetani.[362]

His conclusion is hence a reiteration of the position he has taken all along that yes, there is evidence in the Qur'ān of some verbal harassment and arguments but these in themselves do not fit the picture normally portrayed. He maintains:

> The criticisms may have included false assertions, the plots may have led potentially to disaster, but there is no evidence for any severe persecution or anything that could be called oppression.[363]

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360 Ibid., p. 119.
361 Ibid., p. 123.
362 Ibid., pp. 123-133.
363 Ibid., p. 133.

These form the main favourite themes that Watt deals with in his assessment of the prophet in Makkah.

In the following section, the spotlight will be on his other volume dealing with the Madīnan period of the Prophet's life.

5.3 MUḤAMMAD AT MADINA

5.3.1. STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK.

This work is produced as a sequel to the previous volume which concentrated on the Makkan Chapter of the biography of the Prophet. Originally published in 1956 by the Oxford University Press, the prominence of the work is seen by the fact that it has been rendered into many languages and has undergone several editions and reprints.

In the preface, Watt himself acknowledges that in spite of the effort the has put into it, the extensiveness of the material available has obviously led to picking and choosing or emphasising certain parts and downgrading other aspects. However, as far as he is concerned, he is confident that that is the best he could produce with and if he were to add more to it, it is

> ... as likely to mar as to better the impression ...

he has endeavoured to present.[364]

He identifies two gaps which he is of the view are crucial to a more adequate treatment of the subject at hand. To him,

> ... the normal type of European or American Orientalist is incapable of fulfilling

these gaps.[365]

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364 <u>Madina</u>, p. v.

365 Ibid.

He names the first as a map that adequately reflects the period of Muḥammad. He continues:

> The other serious gap is that he study of life in pre-Islamic Arabia has not kept pace with the development of social anthropology.[366]

He explains that it takes a social anthropologist with expertise to deal with the Arabic source material to be able to make a sound study of the early history of Islam since the non-anthropologist is bound to pass over some vital issues.

The book divides into ten main chapters with a twelve-point addendum. The first chapter carries a title which perhaps explains the way Watt looks at the subject. The title is "The Provocation of the Quraysh" which suggests that the primary blame for the confrontations between the Muslims in Madīna and the Quraysh should be laid at the door of the Prophet. The chapter examines the situation at the early period of Muḥammad's settlement in Madina, the earliest expeditions, the initial skirmish which became the *Causus belli* of the battle of Badr, the battle itself and its aftermath.

In chapter two, the discussion focuses on the Qurayshī attempt to avenge the disaster at Badr. It hence looks at the battle of Uḥud and the siege of Madīna.

The third chapter discusses the circumstances in which the Makkans were more or less becoming amenable to the message of the Prophet. It touches on the expeditions after the episode of Khandaq, the Hudaịbiyyah incident and its aftermath and also the general reactions of the Makkans to the apparent successes of the Prophet ending with the battle of Hunayn and attempts to consolidate the victory gained.

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366 Ibid., pp. v-vi.

Chapter four, entitled 'The Unifying of the Arabs' considers the tribal system in Arabia and Muḥammad's policies which were meant to be the cementing force for them.

'The Internal Politics of Medīna' is the theme for the fifth chapter. Here, Watt investigates the social and political organization in existence at the time of Muḥammad. It also incorporates sections on Muḥammad's supporters and the internal opposition that he (the Prophet) had to grapple with.

The whole of chapter six is devoted to the Jewish question looking at the social standing of the Jews in general before and after the Ḥijrah. The discussion also takes into its purview what Watt calls intellectual and physical attacks on the Jews. This chapter introduces a conclusion which enables the author to wrap up the discussion well.

The seventh chapter, entitled 'The Character of the Islamic State', deals with the Constitution of Madīna, the status of Muḥammad within the arrangement, the nature of the Ummah and financial affairs of the new community.

Chapter eight focuses on the elaborate social reform inaugurated by Muḥammad and takes under its ambit security of life and property, marriage and family and inheritance.

The next chapter examines the new religious establishment covering Islamic religious institutions, Islam and Arab Paganism and ends with a discussion on Islam and Christianity.

The tenth chapter concentrates on the man Muḥammad and his greatness. It looks at his appearance and mien, the supposed moral bankruptcy ending with the foundations of his greatness which takes only about one and a half pages.

The addendum, which the author terms as 'excursus' runs from some further comments on the sources, list of expeditions with dates, a list of slaves and freedmen among the Muhājirūn, to some comments on the letters the Prophet sent to eminent personalities in the

then known world. It continues with discussions on 'those whose hearts are to be reconciled', the translation of some twenty-one letters and treaties, a list of administrators, *zakāh* and *ṣadaqah*, and marriage and family in the pre-Islamic times. The list ends with a look at some technical vocabularies in some selected verses of the Qur'ān dealing with marriage and also some comments on Muḥammad's own marriages.

As usual, Watt provides a clue to his sources by preceding the first chapter with notes on bibliographic details. The book also carries a handsome set of indexes to make for easy reference.

5.3.2 SELECTED THEMES

CONFRONTATIONS.

The first two chapters basically focus on the early encounters between the Muslims of Madīna and their Qurayshī adversaries. The title of the chapter itself is suggestive, calling it 'The provocation of the Quraysh', Watt makes them 'innocent victims' of the whole episode. The tone of the discussion implies that it is the Muslims who provoked a rather 'peaceful' Quraysh and hence led to the confrontations experienced over a long period. It was the Muslims, the title seems to suggest, who broke the peace and made the Quraysh fight back.

We are aware of the possibility of reading the title in two ways: either as an objective genitive case which would mean it is the Prophet who provokes the Quraysh, or subjective genitive sense which would mean the provocation was done by the Quraysh. However, we read it in the first sense because internal evidence in the discussion does not make the second sense plausible.

Starting with the situation at the Ḥijrah, Watt notes the intolerable conditions in Makkah and the demands on the people to accept him as a prophet and a political arbiter in Madīna.[367] Looking at the earliest expeditions, Watt refers to some seventy-four incidents mentioned by al-Wāqidī seven of which are noted to have occurred in the first eighteen months after the Ḥijrah. He then writes:

> They are of slight importance, in that nothing seemed to happen, but they are excellent illustrations of Muhammad's attitude towards the Meccans shortly after his departure from the city.[368]

Despite the acknowledgement that nothing of substance occurred, Watt calls on his readers to take a point into consideration. He says:

> The chief point to note is that the Muslims took the offensive.[369]

The discussion goes on to explain the relative geographical positions of Makkah and Madīna explaining that the expeditionary force was to accost only the detachment accompanying the caravan. The rationale for these *ghazawāt*, Watt remarks,

> ... was doubtless to catch the opponents at a disadvantage - by ambushing them, for instance.[370]

Referring to some of the initial attempts and the numbers involved, Watt reiterates that:

> In all this we may see a deliberate intention on Muḥammad's part to provoke the Meccans.[371]

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367 Ibid., p.3.
This is an interesting comment because Watt has maintained that Muḥammad and his followers did not suffer any severe hardship which could pass for persecution. One wonders why the situation had become that intolerable and impossible to live in Makkah.
Vide, Mecca, esp. pp. 117-136.

368 Medīna, p. 2.

369 Ibid.

370 Ibid.

371 Ibid., p. 4.

Trying to find out the motive for Muḥammad's 'provocation' of the Makkans, Watt speculates whether it was for the conquest of Makkah or the control of the trade routes which passed close to Madīna and in each case he did not find as a valid point. he argues that the Prophet did not seem to be that strong militarily to risk such adventure.

The point one may note is that if this is the case why then does the provocation theory still stand?

Talking of 'incentives' which made the followers of the Prophet heed his 'call' to fight, Watt notes the Qur'ānic references as carrying the strongest incentive where promises of reward in the hereafter reinforced the people's resolve. He then ends this section of the discussion saying:

> Clearly the Muslims regarded their political and military activities as taking place within a religious setting.[372]

The discourse continues with the Nakhlah incident in which ʿAmr b. al-Haḍramī was killed and from the reading, Watt's emphasis is not the clandestine nature of the whole expedition explaining that this was done for security reasons in the light of the elaborate intelligence operations of the Quraish. As to the ethic of the operation the scholar's own assessment could be gleaned from the statement regarding what those who took part might have felt. He asserts that they were more concerned with

> ... the obvious danger of the enterprise and not any scruples about possibly dishonourable aspects of what they were asked to do.[373]

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372 Ibid., p. 5.
373 Ibid., p. 6.

To him, the essence of the Prophet's instructions for the expedition was to 'ambush' the Makkan caravan. Therefore, he rejects as forgery the interpretation of the objective of the expedition to be to keep track of the caravan. He writes:

> The further clause (in some versions) about bringing back a report to Muhammad is clearly a later addition intended to give the word *taraṣṣadū* the meaning 'keep a watch' instead of 'lay an ambush'; in this way all responsibility for blood shedding would be removed from Muḥammad.[374]

Watt speculates that Muḥammad might have assumed that the caravan would have had only a token protection but he is not able to find a n answer to why Muḥammad would order an attack during the sacred month of Rajab.

Again, to reinforce his arguments regarding apportionment of blame, Watt refuses to take into consideration the reasoning that those who attacked the caravan were probably unaware that they were still in the inviolable month. He is of the opinion that this argument

> ... looks like an attempt to whitewash what is known to be black.[375]

The speculations continue that even if it is said that Muḥammad meant to violate the hallowed month he did it not primarily because he was intending to be unethical. However, Watt continues to assume, the Prophet might have violated the hallowed month because it is in accordance with his mission which rejects all heathen practices. Since the whole concept of sacred month dates from the pagan past, violation of it would not be anything tarnishing his image as a prophet. There is a problem in this reasoning however. It is that Watt cannot find any explanation for the fact that the Prophet was not very pleased with the outcome of the

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374 Ibid., p. 7.
375 Ibid.

Nakhlah and was not keen on taking the *khums* from the booty which was acquired. To wriggle out of this, Watt suggests an idea. He says:

> The easiest solution is to hold that after the event he discovered that there was a far greater feeling on the question of violation than he had anticipated.[376]

A revelation then came to settle matters by comparing 'violation of the sacred month' to 'turning people away from God' and the latter pronounced as more heinous a sin.[377] The section under this concludes with the insistence that

> It is tolerably certain that Muhammad himself had few scruples about fighting in the sacred months ...[378]

Turning to the major confrontations, Watt looks at the battle of Badr and right at the beginning of the section makes a suggestive statement. He states that

> The booty from Nakhlah gave a fillip to the policy of raiding Meccan caravans ...[379]

This is to say that the 'provocation' of the Makkans continued and this then led to the real battle at Badr. The scholar even makes the Makkans, despite the unproportionately large force sent to 'protect' Abū Sufyān's caravan, appear only to have intimidated the Muslims rather than anything else. Nevertheless, he acknowledges the emotions whipped up by Abū Jahl to avenge the blood of 'Amr b. al-Hadhramī and possibly eliminate Muḥammad once and for all.

After describing the general outcome of the battle itself, the treatment of prisoners and Muḥammad's general policy on prisoners of war, Watt turns to look at the factors leading to the

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376 Ibid., p. 8.
377 See Sūrah al-Baqarah 2:217.
378 Medina, p. 9.
379 Ibid., p. 10.

defeat of the Quraysh. He notes two main issues with regard to the Quraysh: disunity and over-confidence.[380] On the Muslim side, he notes:

> Their belief in a future life probably gave them greater courage in battle, and Muḥammad's confidence inspired them with confidence. His generalship also won for them a tactical advantage. These seem to be the main reasons for the Muslim victory.[381]

He denies some details of the traditional accounts concerning those killed as exaggerations and even claims that with the Makkans,

> ... at least many of those killed, were considerably older than the majority of the Emigrants, and were probably suffering from thirst.[382]

This assumption hence discounts all arguments for Divine intervention. At this point, Watt is strictly a historian applying the 'scientific criteria' in assessing the material and therefore miracles would not make much sense here. In fact, he makes a passing remark to this in his discussion of the impact of the battle saying:

> Very naturally they regarded it as miraculous, the work of God, as the Qur'an asserted (8:17) ...[383]

As far as the aftermath was concerned, while the result of the battle boosted the resolve of the Muslims, the Makkans interpreted it that Muḥammad had thrown a challenge which needed to be taken up, hence the subsequent clashes.

The first major clash after Badr was the battle of Uḥud in which Watt takes considerable interest. Telling the story of preparation for the battle itself, he does not accept the part about

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380 Ibid., p. 13.
381 Ibid.
382 Ibid.
383 Ibid., p. 15.

ʿAbdullah Ibn Ubayy who withdrew his supporters from the Muslim army. Watt interprets his actions to be an attempt to

> ... defend the main settlement against a possible enemy attack.[384]

He continues arguing on 'Abdallah b. Ubayy's behalf that

> In sources not friendly to him his motives could easily be blackened, especially when, after the battle, he made no secret of his joy at the discomfiture of his rival Muḥammad.[385]

It is rather curious that Watt does not seem to notice a contradiction here. If he accepts the fact that 'Abdallah b. Ubayy openly expressed his joy at the turn of events then one would have thought that there was no attempt at calumniating him by his enemies but that was what actually happened. His activities were judged as treachery and treated as such.

In the details of the battle itself, Watt continues this theory that most of the initial successes of the Muslims had been exaggerated while on the other hand activities attributed to the Quraysh either as individuals or as a group were often peddled by their enemies and were not true.[386]

On the outcome of the Uhud encounter Watt attempts a reconstruction of the traditional accounts. He writes:

> Western scholars have sometimes thought that the sources try to hide the full extent of the disaster at Uḥud. Scrutiny suggests, however, that the opposite is rather the case, and that the Muslims themselves paint Uḥud in gloomier colours than it merits.[387]

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384 Ibid., p. 22.
385 Ibid.
386 See Ibid., pp. 24-25.
387 Ibid., p. 27.

Again, he attributes this to political considerations with the Anṣār making the most of the occasion against the Quraysh and the Umayyads. Further, he mentions the 'spiritual chaos' into which the Muslims were thrown as a result of the outcome of the battle and also the dent it made in the prophetic authority of Muḥammad.

He ends the discussion with a comparative account of Badr and Uhud. He notes:

> If Uhud was not an out-and-out defeat for the Muslims, still less was it a Meccan victory. The Meccan strategic aim was the destruction of the Muslim community and nothing less, and they had fallen far short of this. For many of the Meccans the conscious motive was revenge for the blood shed at Badr; and, if we take the lower figure of about fifty for Meccan dead at Badr, then the Muslims killed at Badr and Uḥud together are slightly more than the Meccans killed in the two battles (though with the higher figure of seventy Meccans killed at Badr the total Muslim dead are slightly fewer).[388]

Turning to the Makkan attempts to solicit the firm support of the tribes in a grand coalition against Muḥammad, Watt mentions two techniques that Muḥammad used to avert that. The first, he says was pre-emptive strikes to break up any incendiary activities and the second was assassinations. He details situations in which, to his judgement, the Prophet, was fully responsible for the 'elimination' of certain active opponents.[389]

The chapter then ends with the event of the siege of Madīna. After giving the general details of this desperate attempt by the Quraysh to complete an unfinished business, Watt again looks for the reasons for the unsuccessful outcome of the siege on the part of the Makkans. He writes that

> Exceptionally cold weather and a storm of wind gave the coup de grace to the morale of the besiegers.[390]

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388 Ibid., pp. 27-28.
If his version of counting is accepted how then can one argue that the Muslims were out to create a gloomier picture than what actually was the case?

389 See Ibid., pp. 29-35.

For the Muslims, he attributes their apparent success to efficient organization, the superior military strategy of the Prophet aided by what he thinks was an efficient intelligence network operated by Muḥammad.

In addition to these, Watt remarks that the Muslims were fully united and brimming with confidence while the Makkan camp was divided and the various groups did not seem to have confidence in each other. Again, he charges the Makkans with lack of proper planning and foresight especially since by the time they arrived at the battlegrounds the fields had been harvested earlier and therefore could not find fodder for their horses.[391]

With the elaborate attempts to annihilate Muḥammad and the dismal failures, Watt is of the view that

> It would be strange if some of the Meccans - a practical people - had not begun to wonder whether it would not be best to accept Muḥammad and his religion.[392]

HUDAIBIYYA AND ITS AFTERMATH.

This theme to Watt, opens up a wider perspective of Muḥammad's character and long term objectives. To him, the Hudaibiyah incident made it clear that the Prophet had a more expansive intention than scholars like him would assume. Hence, al-Hudaibiyah is of especial interest because it is a fertile field

> ... to understand the underlying aims of Muḥammad's overt actions.[393]

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390 Ibid., p. 37.
391 Ibid., pp. 37-38.
392 Ibid., p. 39.
393 Ibid., p. 40.

He maintains, through this argument that the intention to cast the net of Islam further beyond the immediate environs of Madīna and Makkah was a later development. Watt continues:

> On the other hand, the suggestion of some Muslim sources, though not the earliest, that he conceived of Islam as a universal religion and summoned the Byzantine and Persian emperors and other lesser potentates to accept, is almost certainly false.[394]

He acknowledges merely that Islam, from it beginnings had the potential of a Universal religion and this potential was actualised in the expansion period. he however does not offer any tangible reasons for his rejection of the invitations Muḥammad was known to have sent to various emperors and other rulers other than that there are alleged inconsistencies in the reports about he messengers sent. In a rather flimsy remark he reasons that

> ... It is barely credible that a wise statesman like Muhammad should have made this precise appeal at this precise stage in his career ...[395]

One notes a slight change in Watt's perception of Muḥammad at this stage of the career. Perhaps for the first time Watt seems to use the epithet 'statesman' rather than a prophet. Within the two pages one senses this change very forcefully.[396] He speculates the best one could settle for in this issue is that Muḥammad might have sent a political message because, to him, it sounds incredible that the Roman emperor or the Negus could have been invited to Islam. He unfortunately does not say why this could not be done apart from the mere fact that

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394 Ibid., p. 41.
395 Ibid.
396 Ibid., pp. 40-41.

they were too powerful. He even curiously surmises that granted that the embassies were actually sent,

> ... It is not impossible that the contents of the letters have been somewhat altered in the course of transmission. This may be either because the details were not known to the messenger ((who is the presumptive source of information), or because later developments made the message seem trivial and unworthy of a great prophet.[397]

The discussion refers to interest that Muḥammad showed in the tribes towards the northern route to Syria and looking for the factors which led to this interest, Watt discounts religion as one of them. He sees Muḥammad as primarily being interested in the strengthening of the Madīna economy. Further, he alleges that as more and more tribes came to accept Islam, and with the legal prohibition of in-raiding amongst Muslims, Muḥammad had

> ... to find an alternative outlet for their energies.[398]

He continues with an uncharacteristically harsh usage of vocabulary thus:

> The peace of Islam, as administered by the *iron hand of Muḥammad*, would bring prosperity for the Arabs, but only if the means of subsistence was correspondingly increased.[399]

Hence, to him, the expansion of Islam was not for religious reasons but for political and economic objectives. The expedition to al-Ḥudaibiyah is thus being portrayed as a fitting conclusion to the efforts to achieve these goals.

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397 Ibid., p. 41.
398 Ibid., p. 45.
399 Ibid. The emphasis is ours.

Recounting the details of the premonition which led to the trip to al-Hudaybiyah some of which he discounts as later embellishments though, Watt claims that when the objective of pilgrimage was not achieved Muḥammad

> ... was naturally puzzled when what he regarded as a Divine promise was not fulfilled.[400]

Yet again, Watt notes that even though the Prophet had the intention of performing the pilgrimage, he was more interested in the political implications of it than the religious. These, he notes, are that the pilgrimage would have buttressed his argument that Islam was not an alien religion and hence was not a danger to the Makkan establishment. Again, he points out that the performance of the pilgrimage would have demonstrated to the Makkans that Muḥammad was ready to be friendly with them.

Watt, unlike many of his predecessors pays much attention to the al-Hudaybiyah subject discussing the factors leading to the journey, the course of events, the text of the treaty and its implications for both the Quraysh and Muḥammad.

Basically, Watt notes that the treaty was a face-saving achievement for the Quraysh while it offered Muḥammad more than he could have possibly obtained at the battlefield. However, he states that the Prophet's followers were not happy with the outcome and hence he needed to forestall a potential crisis. He then writes:

> It is against this background that the Pledge of Good Pleasure (bay'at al-ridwān) must be considered.[401]

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400 Ibid., p. 47.
401 Ibid., p. 50.

The expedition to Khaybar, Watt says, came precisely as a result of this incident, to reward those who took part in the *bai'at al-riḍwān*. He claims that:

> ... Muḥammad had evolved the scheme of attacking the rich Jewish settlement of Khaybar, but allowing only those who took the pledge at al-Hudaybiyah to participate.[402]

In his concluding assessment of the al-Ḥudaybiyah treaty, despite what he has already said, the scholar states that:

> The treaty of al-Hudaybiyah was only satisfactory for the Muslims in so far as one believed in Islam and its attractive power.[403]

He explains that if Muḥammad had not handled the Muslim community deftly as he did, the al-Hudaybiyah agreement would not have been that profitable.

Looking at conversions which resulted out of the treaty, Watt points out that material factors certainly were instrumental but he also advocates that some room has to be left for the deep conviction of Muḥammad that he was bearing a Divine message meant for the whole of humankind and also that Islam had both religious and political significance.

For the post-al-Ḥudaybiyah period, Watt catalogues a number of expeditions which, he suggests, were carried out because of the enormous boost Muhammad had at al-Ḥudaybiyah.

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402 Ibid., p. 51.
403 Ibid.

THE FALL OF MAKKAH.

In discussing the al-Hudaibiyah topic, the significance of Makkah to Islam was emphasised. Hence, under this theme, Watt intimates that, all along, Muḥammad has been eyeing Makkah but merely as a means to an end - ostensibly more expansive policies. It is further argued here that Muslims had almost nostalgic attachment to Makkah being the preparatory ground for Islam and hence wanted to have an unimpeded access to the city. In addition, the scholar asserts that Muḥammad was convinced that

> Could Mecca be brought under his sway, his prestige and power would be greatly increased; without Mecca his position was comparatively weak.[404]

He adds that the Prophet was also thinking of the vast military and administrative resource that Makkah could bring to the Islamic state. Makkah therefore, had to be taken.

In all these, the religious objective is relatively played down and more prominence is given to the political and economic ends. As we have already noted, this is like a red thread that runs through the whole of the Madīnan era of Watt's biography. It is therefore suggested that the political and economic motives made Muḥammad assemble a force large enough to intimidate the Makkans cowing them to submission.

Noting that Makkah fell with virtually no bloodshed, Watt sets out looking for reasons for Muḥammad's magnanimity to all the residents including even his avowed enemies. Again, he assigns material considerations for the Prophet's gesture. He says:

> Muhammad's policy of forbidding all pillage meant that some of his poorer followers were now in want, and from some of the rich men of Mecca whom he had treated so magnanimously Muhammad requested loans.[405]

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404 Ibid., p. 65.
405 Ibid., p. 67.

He further notes that none of those leaders who offered large sums of money were forced to accept Islam implying that they 'bought' their independence with the loans they dispensed.

Watt ends the section with the reasons for Muḥammad's successes and counts two main elements. He identifies

> ... the attractiveness of Islam and its relevance as a religious and social system to the religious and social needs of the Arabs.[406]

as the first. In addition to this is the personal ingenuity of the Prophet himself. He argues that the success owes much also to

> ... Muhammad's own tact, diplomacy, and administrative skill ... .[407]

THE UNIFICATION OF THE TRIBES

This theme which falls under chapter four takes the largest space as compared to the other chapters. One could argue that this is indicative of the significance Watt attaches to the subject.

The discussion takes an overview of the Prophet's policy towards the tribes around the peninsula and the tone of the arguments implies that Muḥammad was out to look for personal aggrandisement as against the spreading of the message of his mission. Yet again, the theory which downgrades purely religious motives for Muḥammad's activities is at play here.

Referring to the traditional view that most of the tribes in Arabia accepted Islam, Watt doubts the accuracy of such opinion and interprets the various *wafds* that the Prophet received as merely for political alliances instead of acceptance of the Prophet's religious mission. From

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406 Ibid., p. 69.
407 Ibid.

this platform, therefore, he argues that strictly speaking the *Riddah* wars were not about apostasy but concerned political disloyalty. He asserts that

> The supposed 'deputations' of all the tribes and their conversion are largely pious inventions to magnify the achievement of Muḥammad (and perhaps to minimize that of Abu Bakr).[408]

The scholar enters into an elaborate discussion of the various tribes and the alliance with Madīna dividing them into geographical groups possibly to make for easier analysis and for maximum impact in the arguments. He looks at the tribes to the West of Makkah and Madīna , those to the East, the northern tribes and ending with those in the south and the rest of Arabia.

Often, in the discussion one reads of Muḥammad encouraging some tribes men who have joined him to attack others to force them into the alliance while others were more or less coerced into Islam through economic blackmail.[409]

He does not attach much weight to material which does not seem to support this line of argument. For example, concerning some of the documents used in the classical sources, he writes:

> Some of the passages which have been thought to indicate that Muḥammad made agreements without demanding acceptance of Islam are inconclusive.[410]

However, he makes a distinction, between agreements made with 'pagans' and those made with Christians. With the latter, room was left for them to be members of the *Pax Islamica* subject only to the payment of the *jizyah*.

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408 Ibid., p. 80.
It seems curious as to why this comparison of Muhammad's achievements as against those of Abu Bakr has come up so suddenly.

409 Ibid., see esp. pp. 113-124.

410 Ibid., pp. 125-126.

Ending the chapter, Watt examines the success of the Prophet's policy. He points out that even though the Arabs had ideas about unification of the tribes in the peninsula, it was only Muḥammad who actually gave real form to such budding ideas. They existed merely as potentials literally awaiting their actualisation in the period of Muḥammad.[411]

He reiterates his argument that Muḥammad initially thought he was sent merely to his own people hence the universalistic image of Islam came as a later development. Again, he reasons, the alliances the Prophet built initially in Madīna were based on secular foundations. He states:

> The whole of Muhammad's work may be regarded as the building on religious foundations of a political, social and economic system; and his tribal policy was merely an aspect of this.[412]

He rationalizes his arguments by pointing out that Makkah, as a classical example, had no religious demands made to it before it capitulated and even at the time of the Prophet's demise there were quite a number of tribes who had merely political alliances with Madīna. The argument continues asserting that the Prophet was not keen on turning the whole of Arabia Muslims otherwise there would be too many people making demands on the dwindling resources of Madīna since there would virtually be no place to raid.[413]

411 Ibid., p. 143.
412 Ibid., p. 144.
413 Ibid., see esp. pp. 145-146.

Despite all this, Watt acknowledges that people did not come to accept Islam merely or only on material or emotional grounds as sometimes asserted in some Western opinions. He points out that:

> Islam provided an economic, social, and political system, the Pax Islamica. Of this system religion was an integral part; it may be called the ideological aspect of the system. The peace and security given by the system were 'the security of God and of His Messenger'.[414]

He adds that Islam provided the people a standard of living they were probably not used to and the Prophet's own attitude towards his followers was one of respect, and courtesy. As far as the religious aspect is concerned, Watt explains that a seed was always in people's heart awaiting the 'fertile season' to sprout and the advent of Muḥammad inaugurated that long-awaited 'season'. he likens this to the political sphere where, he says,

> ... there is the familiar phenomenon of 'the rush to get on the bandwagon'.[415]

In these sections concluding the discussions on the theme, one sees Watt the historian exhibiting his theological sense allowing religious sentiments to be part of the underlying factors which made people join Islam. He indicated that even though in Western scholarship the phenomenal increase in the Muslim membership in the ninth and tenth years of the Ḥijrah could only be for political reasons, one cannot doubt the intrinsic religious explanations since

> ... in the integral reality of the events the religious and political factors were inseparable.[416]

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414 Ibid., p. 146.
415 Ibid., p. 147.
416 Ibid.

He advises that it would be an error to consider 'religion' in the European understanding while looking at a situation of this nature instead of looking at it from the point of view of the Arab. When it is viewed in the sense of the latter, then

> The Riddah was a movement away from the religious, social, economic and political system of Islam, and so was anti-Islamic.[417]

As far as the subject of the unification of Arabia is concerned, Watt points out that even though it was not achieved in its entirety, Muḥammad

> ... had done more than sceptical European scholars have allowed. Moreover, his personal influence doubtless gave him power and authority beyond that conferred by formal agreements, ...[418]

In his final statement in the deliberation, Watt argues that there were 'great upheavals' during the age especially with respect to super-power conflicts between Persia and Byzantium and hence many people needed some spiritual support to lean on. He then writes that

> The 'false prophets' tried to meet this need, but had little success.[419]

He adds that the Christians were in dire need of this spiritual solace since their links with the Byzantine empire had been severed. Hence, he continues, Islam with its alluring successes might have offered a great appeal and

> Only a deeply rooted Christianity could withstand such fascination.[420]

The implications of these two statements are for the reader to infer.

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417 Ibid., p. 148.
418 Ibid., p. 149.
419 Ibid.
420 Ibid., p. 150.

THE JEWISH QUESTION.

In the preceding chapters of the book, Watt makes cursory reference to how Muḥammad's relationship with the Jewish tribes was. In fact, relatively, the Jewish tribes are mentioned more than any other single tribe in the whole book. Even without going through the book, the references in the index are pointers to this.

Mention is made of the expulsion of the B. Qaynuqā' and the assassination of Ka'b b. al-Ashraf for which the Prophet is held responsible. In the latter incident, Watt writes that Ka'b's head was

> ... carried off and flung at Muḥammad's feet.

adding that it became

> ... clear that Muḥammad was not a man to be trifled with.. For those who accepted him as leader there were material advantages; for those who opposed him there were serious disadvantages.[421]

Again, the an-Nadīr and the B. Qurayzah and the charges against them are briefly mentioned. It is however in the sixth chapter that the discussion of the Jewish questions is the central emphasis.

The chapter divides into sections dealing with the Jews of Yathrib, the situation of the Jews at the period of Ḥijrah and the alleged attempts by Muḥammad to make overtures to them to impress upon them the affinity that Islam had with the teachings of Moses.

Perhaps the main force of the arguments have to do with what Watt describes as intellectual and physical attacks on the Jews and ends with concluding remarks. Watt asks

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421 Ibid., p. 19.
See also pp. 8,15, & 18.

questions about the origins of the Jewish tribes noting that they were largely at odds with each other in their settlement in Yathrib.

Speculating on the pre-Ḥijrah situation, the scholar alleges that there might have been attempts to win over the Jews to the side of Muḥammad but these were spurned except that they were prepared to enter into some political arrangement with him. The Ḥijrah, therefore, the assumption continues was thought of by Muḥammad as a good opportunity to achieve successes where initial efforts have failed.[422]

As the situation unfolded, the discussion points out that:

> ... the great majority of the Jews not merely did not accept Muhammad, but became increasingly hostile. ... Very soon after the Hijrah it must have become clear that few Jews were likely to accept the Gentile prophet.[423]

Moving onto the subject of the Prophet's attempts to 'get closer' to the Jews, Watt asserts that Muḥammad increasingly

> ... tried to model Islam on the older religion.[424]

He mentions that Waraqah's statement that Muḥammad had encountered the same *nāmūs* as experienced by Moses must have left the Prophet thinking and hence, in Madīna, he taught his followers to observe the Jewish Sabbath. Watt again claims that

> ... the Friday worship, which became a distinctive feature of Islam, was somehow connected with Judaism.[425]

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422 Ibid., pp. 195-196.
423 Ibid., pp. 197-198.
424 Ibid., p. 198.
425 Ibid.

Further, he refers to the *qiblah* which was initially Jerusalem as another evidence supporting the ongoing reasoning. He is very sceptical of the existence of any *qiblah* in the pre-Ḥijrah times. However, he also acknowledges that even if Muḥammad asked his people to face Jerusalem in prayer this does not necessarily indicate Jewish influence because, apparently the Christians also had a similar practice.[426]

The apparent contradiction is solved by remarking that the 'Jerusalem *qiblah*' idea was taken by Muḥammad from his Madīnan followers.

In addition to these, Watt argues, is the incontrovertible issue of the Fast of 'Āshūrā which was established to coincide with the Jewish Day of Atonement. Even the midday prayer (Ẓuhr Ṣalāh) is considered here as another case in point since, it is said, it was introduced in the Madīnan period.[427] Watt goes on, relying on Buhl, Caetani, Wensinck and Becker, to suggest that

> ... in building the mosque at Madina Muhammad had in mind the Jewish synagogue; ... .[428]

The seemingly unending catalogue of so-called Jewish practices followed by Muḥammad adds the Qur'ānic permission to eat the food of the People of the Book and to marry from their pious women.[429]

The main motives behind all these 'overtures' Watt maintains were for Muḥammad to endear himself to the Jews and also to seek some authentication for his religious status if he were recognized as preaching virtually Jewish ideas.

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426 Ibid., p. 199.
He cites Tor Andrae's Ursprung des Islams and the work of buhl as authorities for the opinion.

427 Medina, p. 199.

428 Ibid.

429 Ibid., pp. 199-200.
See Sūrah al-Mā'idah 5:5.

The discussion then focuses on so-called sudden change of attitude in Muḥammad towards the Jews. The change in *qiblah* and the institution of *Ramaḍān* fast are mentioned with the latter being speculated as being of Christian influence form its observance of Lent.[430] Citing Bell however, another theory develops that the fast of *Ramaḍān* was instituted to commemorate the battle of Badr since it was similar to God's deliverance of the Jews from the pursuing army of the Pharaoh.[431]

In concluding this section of the chapter, Watt writes:

> These marks of the 'the break with the Jews' are in fact indications of a completely new orientation both politically and religiously. The Medīnan state now began a series of attacks on the Jews in the physical sphere, and at the same time the Qur'ān carried on polemics against their religion in the intellectual sphere.[432]

Thus, the ground is prepared for a discourse on the alleged intellectual and physical aggression against the Jews.

The contention starts with the line of reasoning that in the pre-Ḥijrah, the Arabs and Muḥammad and his people for that matter had no idea as to the linkage of Abraham and his son Ishmael with the Ka'bah. It was only in Madīna that after learning form the Jews about Abrahamic stories, Muḥammad introduced a connection between Islam and Abraham. The argument is based on the premise that the Qur'ān does not refer to this connection in the Makkan texts. Abraham therefore became an important personality and an instrument to be used in critique of both Jews and Christians.[433] Hence the whole spectrum of Qur'ānic critical references to Jewish behaviour in terms of their devotion to God, their original scripture and to

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430 Ibid., p. 203.
431 Ibid.
Cf. Bell, Origin of Islam in its Christian Environment, (London, 1926), p. 124 ff.
432 Medīna, p. 204.
433 Ibid., pp. 204-206.

the Prophet is interpreted as later developments which arose because of the apparent frustration of Muḥammad in failing to get the Jews to accept him despite all the elaborate overtures made. The Qur'ān is therefore pictured as resorting to polemics against the Jews. He therefore advises that this point has to be taken into consideration since it forms the basis of

> ... the actual hostilities between Muḥammad and the Jews.[434]

The reader is then led onto the topic of physical confrontations between the Jews and the Muslims. The events leading to the expulsion of the B. Qaynuqā' from Madīna are revisited and the picture presented suggests that the actual event was trivial but

> Muḥammad regarded the matter as a casus belli, and collected a force to besiege the clan.[435]

Perhaps, the case of the expulsion of the B. an-Naḍīr is presented with even a more interesting style. It starts with the murder of Ka'b b. al-Ashraf of the an-Naḍīr who, Watt says, was murdered at the active encouragement and to the delight of the Prophet. As for the *causa proxima* of the banishment after relating the story, Watt writes that the decision taken

> ... seems to be out of proportion to the offence, or rather to the apparently flimsy grounds for supposing that treachery was mediated.[436]

In an attempt to find the rational behind what he maintains to be a harsh verdict, he returns to the *causa remota* which is the assassination of Ka'b b. al-Ashraf arguing that with that incident at the back of Muḥammad's mind, he (Muḥammad) was always fearing an attack form the

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434 Ibid., p. 208.
435 Ibid., p. 209.
436 Ibid., p. 211.

an-Nadhir. It is then noted that

> The expulsion of an-Nadir from Medina was not the end of their dealings with Muhammad. From Khaybar some of them continued to intrigue assiduously against Medina, and played a considerable part in the formation of the great confederacy to besiege Medina in April 627 (xi/5).[437]

If there is any incident in the biography of Muhammad that stirs revulsion among many a Western scholar, it is possibly the case of the B. Qurayzah. Watt is of no exception in this. In relating the narrative concerning the matter, the B. Qurayzah are portrayed as having behaved neutrally in so far as the Khandaq episode is concerned even though it is admitted that they had some discussions with the Quraysh and could have attacked the Muslims if they really had trust in the Quraysh. Hence it is stated that:

> Muhammad attacked Qurayzah, to show that the rising Islamic State was not prepared to tolerate such 'sitting on the fence'.[438]

Muhammad himself was supposed to have selected Sa'd b. Mu'ādh as the judge and Sa'd pronouncing the verdict with his advanced age and devotion to Islam in mind. He is said to have put Islam ahead of his tribal affiliations for fear of upsetting Muhammad and being seen as sliding back into his pre-Islamic situation.

Watt rejects the usual Western reasoning that it was Muhammad's definite strategy to rid Medina completely of Jews referring to the Madinan constitution as evidence where references are made to the Jews. It is true, he admits, that the main Jewish tribes had been expelled but there were other smaller units of Jews left.

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437 Ibid., p. 212.
438 Ibid., p. 214.

The expedition to the Jewish settlement of Khaybar on Muḥammad's return from al-Hudaibiyyah is mentioned. The main motive, Watt says, was

> ... for him to have booty to distribute to his followers whose expectations had recently been disappointed.[439]

The result was that

> Khaybar was ... reduced to a position of subservience and rendered innocuous.[440]

In his concluding remarks to the theme, Watt speculates what would have happened if the Jews had not opposed Muḥammad but accepted him. He conjectures that among other things Islam would have become

> ... a sect of Jewry.

He immediately adds:

> How different the face of the world would be now, had that happened![441]

He is of the opinion that despite the validity of the Jewish refusal to acknowledge Muḥammad due to their traditional exclusive claims, their hostile and derisive attitude towards Muḥammad was not necessary.

On the side of Muḥammad, it is argued that the behaviour of the Jews was a real danger to everything he stood for and therefore he could not overlook them.

Again, Watt continues to argue, Muḥammad had the wealth of the Jews in mind in his confrontations with them but that alone does not fully explain the total rationale behind the

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439 Ibid., p. 218.
See supra - the discussion on the theme of al-Hudaibiyah.

440 Ibid.

441 Ibid., p. 219.

whole history of the bumpy relationship. He puts a finger on what he considers to be the key point. He says:

> ... the fundamental reason for the quarrel was theological on both sides. The Jews believed that God had chosen them specially, Muḥammad realized that his prophethood was the only possible basis of Arab Unity. As so often in the history of the Middle East, theology and politics are intermingled.[442]

THE CONSTITUTION OF MADĪNA.

This is a subject that is often left untouched or treated either superficially or even in a slipshod manner. Watt pays a particular attention to it discussing it in the context of his outlook on the larger question of 'The character of the Islamic state'. He reproduces the text as found in Ibn Isḥāq's work but follows Wensick's paragraphing of it.[443]

Watt's introductory remarks suggest a sceptical attitude to the document but nevertheless he discusses it. Discussing its authenticity and dating the scholar asserts that it is not clear if the document had that kind of prominence as it is often allotted it. He, however, finds some evidence which indicate that if could not have been forged. He comments that

> No later falsifier, writing under the Umayyads or 'Abbāsids, would have included non-Muslims in the Ummah, would have retained the articles against Quraysh, and would have given Muḥammad so insignificant a place.[444]

From the style of the language and other details, the document is attributed to the Madīnan period even though its precise dating is not certain. He refers to differences amongst Western writers like Welhausen, Grimme and Caetani as to whether it is a pre- or post- Badr document.[445]

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442 Ibid., p. 220
443 Ibid., see pp. 221-225.
444 Ibid., p. 225.
445 Ibid., pp. 225-226.

Watt's usual passion for finer details is displayed here in his scrutiny of the document trying to have a precise dating for it and also understand what he considers to be crucial lacunae especially regarding the absence of the three main Jewish clans mentioned by name.[446] In the end, he is of the view that the so called Constitution of Madīna was probably not one whole document but a series of enactments issued at different periods and put together later. He has no solid proof though, and is perhaps content with saying finally that

> ... there is much that is bound to remain conjectural and obscure.[447]

As far as he could glean from the document regarding the position of Muḥammad, Watt notes that the Prophet remains as a sort of *primus inter pares* without any specific authoritarian powers. Even where actions have been carried out on 'his behalf', the argument says, it is always not clear to see Muḥammad openly behind it. His powers, in a way, were 'limited'. He gives the B. Qurayẓah issue as a typical example where Muḥammad had to 'use' someone to achieve an objective he wanted. The point being argued here gives force to the arguments regarding Muḥammad's political dexterity.[448]

MUḤAMMAD'S PERSONALITY.

The last important theme in the work is an assessment of the personality of the Prophet and in this Watt is undeniably a world apart from his predecessors. In the first section the discussion is devoted to the Prophet's physical characteristics and some personal traits regarding his emotions, management of time and general behaviour in public.

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446 Ibid., pp. 226-228.
447 Ibid., pp. 228.
448 Ibid., see pp. 228-238.

Watt refers to the traditional accounts and remarks that despite the possibility of attempts to paint an ideal man

> ... the probability is that the general picture is sound.[449]

His affection for children, his

> ... courage, resoluteness, impartiality, firmness inclining to severity but tempered by generosity[450]

are all noted.

Turning to a more thorny subject-matter, the scholar discusses his 'alleged moral failures'. He points out at the onset that

> Of all the world's great men, none has been so much maligned as Muḥammad.[451]

He goes back to the Medieval pictures created of the Prophet due primarily to the then geo-political situation of the World where Islam and Muḥammad for that matter, was seen as a threat. Watt writes:

> ... medieval war-propaganda, free from the restraints of factuality, was building up a conception of 'the great enemy'.[452]

Referring to various images made of Muḥammad and the rituals of name-calling, he also mentions the attempts made by Peter the Venerable to offer a sound picture of Islam and Muḥammad. Nevertheless, he admits

> Since then much has been achieved, especially during the last two centuries or so, but many of the old prejudices linger on.[453]

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449 Ibid., p. 322.
450 Ibid., p. 323.
451 Ibid., p. 324.
452 Ibid.
453 Ibid.

He advocates a more objective appraisal of Muḥammad arguing that as a reaction to the biased theses, there have been attempts by some scholars of offering a romantic Muḥammad as an alternative. He hence rejects both the disparaging and romantic methodologies and claim to give an objective view basing his discussion on three areas: Muḥammad's alleged insincerity, sensuality and treachery.[454]

On the question of insincerity or imposture, Watt agrees with Carlyle's famous rebuttal and states that the whole theory is preposterous and does not in anyway explain the real character of Muḥammad.

He is however quick to clarify his acceptance of Muḥammad's sincerity. He states emphatically that it should not be misunderstood as meaning acknowledgement of the Qur'ān as an authentic revelation from God. He maintains that

> ... a man may without contradiction hold that Muḥammad truly believed that he was receiving revelations from God but that he was mistaken in this belief.[455]

He continues reasoning rather interestingly thus:

> ... the alleged fact that the revelations fitted in with Muḥammad's desires and pandered to his selfish pleasure would not prove him insincere; it would merely show him to be capable of self-deception.[456]

Further, he argues that the allegations made against Muḥammad by some Western scholars like Bell and others that he sometimes modified Qur'ānic statements does not imply he was

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454 Ibid.
Since we have dealt with some of these charges in the discussion on the Medieval views (see supra Chpt.1), we do not intend repeating them here. We restrict ourselves basically to Watt's own opinions on these issues.

455 Ibid., p. 325.

456 Ibid.

insincere. He even refers to the science of abrogation in Qur'ānic scholarship as a proof that the so called 'changes' were sincerely believed by Muḥammad to have come from God.

On the issues of moral debauchery and duplicity, Watt is of the view that the cases of marriage to Zaynab and what, he calls 'breaking the treaty of al-Ḥudaybiyah' could be problematic in justifying them but even here, he argues,

> ... there is ample room for dispute about circumstances and motives.[457]

He cautions against applying the standards of one age to judge the acts of another. From this therefore, he notes that even if all those acts attributed to him are true, very often by the standards of that age and environment one could not categorise them as immoral or treacherous.

Perhaps on behalf of Muḥammad, Watt argues that the primary objective was formation of the society based on what he believed was revelation from God and hence

> ... the religious aspect was probably more important than the purely moral one.[458]

Further, he states

> ... the common European and Christian criticism that Muḥammad was a sensualist or, in the blunter language of the seventeenth century, an 'old lecher', fades away when examined in the light of the standards of Muhammad's time.[459]

The issue of marriage to Zaynab bt. Jahsh is taken up as an example of the topics of criticism. Watt gives the details as he understands it from the sources and largely rejects the charge of incestuous relationship or sensuality levelled against the Prophet. He explains that in the first place the Qur'ān sanctioned the marriage but again, and probably for him more importantly, it

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457 Ibid., p. 327.
458 Ibid., p. 328.
459 Ibid., p. 329.

was not blind lust which led to the Zaynab marriage but it was for political ends.[460] He points out rather that:

> In his day and generation Muḥammad was a social reformer, indeed a reformer even in the sphere of morals. He created a new system of social security and a new family improvement on what went before.[461]

Watt maintains that there is no real evidence suggesting a decline in Muḥammad's character in the latter years of his missions. He remarks that in our contemporary times, Muslims see Muḥammad as a model for humankind and call people to acknowledge this but there have been no sober reflections on this call. He asks, in this context,

> Are any principles to be learnt from the life and teaching of Muḥammad that will contribute to the one morality of the future?[462]

He continues that non-Muslims in general have not given any firm response to this yet but he insists, perhaps correctly, that the response would definitely depend upon the way Muslims themselves live Islam or expose Muḥammad to the non-Muslim world for that matter.

He is however sceptical of Muslims being able to meet this demand. He asserts bluntly:

> A combination of sound scholarship and deep moral insight is essential, and this combination is rare. I will not conceal my personal view that Muslims are unlikely to be successful in their attempt to influence world opinion, at least in the sphere of morals.[463]

He however, intriguingly, accepts that Islam as a 'religion' has something to remind other monotheistic faiths of

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460 See his arguments in Ibid., pp. 329-332.
461 Ibid., p. 332.
462 Ibid., p. 333.
463 Ibid., p. 334.

In the concluding section of the book, Watt attempts to examine the grounds for Muḥammad's greatness noting various incidents which he thinks were contributory to this. He makes mention of a favourable period in history and in an environment where general social malaise coupled with troubled conditions among the then empires and also what he calls an increasing consciousness among nomadic tribes to plunder others and lead a normal settled life. Despite these, he acknowledges that without the unique personal traits of that person called Muḥammad things would not have gone the way they went. Islam would not have attained the heights it did. He identifies three particular characteristics of Muḥammad which were crucial contributory factors for the huge success. These are Muḥammad's gift as a seer, his being a wise statesman and a shrewd and skilful administrator.[464]

He finally observes that without these traits in addition to

> ... his trust in God and firm belief that God had sent him, a notable chapter in the history of mankind would have remained unwritten.[465]

To round off the discussion on Watt's two volume biographical work on Muḥammad perhaps it is important to mention his third work entitled Muḥammad-Prophet and Statesman[466] which is basically a compendium of the two volumes already discussed.

He himself makes it clear in the 'Note on the Sources' that

> The present work is essentially an abridgement of my books Muḥammad at Mecca and Muḥammad at Medina (Oxford, 1953, 1956). The chief difference is that in the present volume the chronological order has been more strictly adhered to. here and there this may have produced a slight change of emphasis, *but there is no fundamental change in the views presented.*[467]

464 Ibid., pp. 334-335.
465 Ibid., p. 335.
466 Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961.
This volume has seen a lot of reprints through the various offices and agents of the Oxford University Press throughout the world.
467 Ibid., p. 242.

This is very true; and as for the slight emphasis in certain places he is talking about, one specific example has to do with the Jewish question which now takes up forty nine pages out of a book of two hundred and forty-five pages.[468] Since the essential thesis is the same, we do not intend analysing it.

The next chapter of the thesis which is the Conclusion recapitulates essential issues and focuses on some of the central arguments of the three key scholars we have looked at. It also raises issues of sound Western academic scholarship, the scientific study of religion and their application in the study of Islam. The question of how one academically deals with a faith one does not share would be asked and an attempt made to analyse it.

Emphasis ours.

468 Ibid., see pp. 127-175.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

6.1 GENERAL COMMENTS.

Throughout the discourse, one of our dominant objectives has been an analysis of how the Medieval portrayal of the life and ministry of the Prophet Muḥammad has survived in later times especially in the period of enlightened scholarship.

As far as the main Medieval attitudes are concerned, we have attempted to explain these in Chapter One delineating some of the motives behind them.

In our concluding discussion we do not intend repeating all those comments except perhaps reinforcing them with other arguments and opinions.

On this theme, some of the most interesting arguments could be found in the works of Norman Daniel and Edward Said[1] - some of which we have consulted. Being aware of the controversy surrounding the works of Edward Said in later days, especially after the publication of his Orientalism, we deem it quite appropriate to refer to some later opinions which might be perceived as providing useful correctives and more systematic overview than those of Daniel and Said. In fact, in Norman Daniel's 1993 revised edition of his own work which he sadly did not see published before he passed away, a few additions are made to the last chapter on 'The survival of Medieval concepts' a theme which is of much interest to this project and hence we would refer to some of them.[2]

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1 Daniel, N., Islam and the West - the Makind of an Image, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1960). (Revised Ed., Oxford: One World Publications, 1993).
Said, E., Orientalism - Western Conceptions of the Orient, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1978). (Reprinted with a new afterword by London etc.: Penguin Books Ltd., 1995).

2 The 1993 ed. of Islam and the West.

In the same vein the 1995 reprint of Edward Said's work has a new afterword which makes a significant impact on the original ideas.[3]

We are aware that the project has inevitably entered the hot Orientalist debate but our objective is not primarily to join the fray but merely to analyse the works of the three key British authors which have made significant influence on students of Islam.

Again, part of our investigation has crossed into the territory of Inter-Faith Relations as a matter of course and hence in this final chapter we intend making some comments on this. After all, our three selected key scholars were either ordained ministers of the Church or had close association with the Church establishment. In fact, generally, a significant number of the Western writers in this field could be categorised as such.

On the face of it, this might not be regarded as relevant since Western enlightened scholarship is supposed to create a forum for dispassionate, scientific investigation or analysis of a subject. However, when a theologian seeks to become a historian or at least portray himself as one the distinctive line between theology and history often becomes muddled.

We seek to reiterate that in the case of our three key scholars, this has sadly been the case.

Hal Koch, in his work on Constantine, writes that

> The task of the historian is to let history itself speak; to describe, as honestly as possible, what did happen; and to bring the past and our times into contact.[4]

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3 The 1995 reprint of Orientalism.

4 Konstantin den Store. Pax Romana: Pax Christina, (Copenhagen, 1952), p. 74.

However, Koch himself was 'found guilty' of writing a theologian's construction of history.[5] G. Zuntz in his review article on Koch's work observes that the theologian in the scholar has tipped the balance in his favour and this has damaged

> ... the correctness of his historical vision.[6]

Possibly, a similar remark could be made against the three scholars we have investigated.

Zuntz, in his final remarks on the book writes:

> He who merely collects historical data is in danger of missing the significance of each and all of them; while he who strives to understand them as strands in a meaningful web may lose his hold upon the infinity of concrete details which in their combination make up that whole which he strives to grasp. This antinomy to be overcome calls for a combination of historical mastery and philosophical penetration ... .[7]

Our research has sought to point out instances where historical data have either been misinterpreted or scholars have allowed their theological stance to lead them to an interpretation or over-simplification bordering on falsity. We now return to concluding remarks on the project, chapter by chapter, beginning with the Medieval setting where the Orientalist debate is an issue.

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5 Koch was a professor of Theology at the University of Copenhagen.

6 See the review article entitled 'The Theologian as Historian - some Reflections upon a new book on Constantine the Great' in HJ Vol. LII, (Oct. 1953, July 1954), pp. 252-259, quotation on p. 253. G. Zuntz was a senior lecturer in Hellenistic Greek, University of Manchester.

7 Ibid., p. 259.

6.2 THE MEDIEVAL SETTING AND THE ORIENTALIST DEBATE

6.2.1 EDWARD SAID.

Maxime Rodinson, in his thoughts on the future of researches in Islam, offers an advice to students not to be too dogmatic about that phenomenon called Orientalism. He in fact goes as far as pointing out that

> There is, ... no such thing as Orientalism, Sinology, Iranology, and so forth. Rather, there are scientific disciplines defined both by the object of their study and by the direction the study takes, such as sociology, demography, political economy, linguistics, anthropology, ethnology or the various branches of general history.[8]

Of course it has to be understood that he is not denying the existence of a particular field of study labelled 'Orientalism' as such but he is merely remarking that the method of study is supposed to be scientific.

In a follow up comments he says that Orientalism as a concept was born out of a particular pragmatic necessity which faced Europe. He continues:

> This situation was reinforced by European dominance over the other societies, and the result was a greatly distorted vision of things.[9]

One suspects that his comments have to do with the work of Edward Said which he criticises severely.

After appreciating Said as attacking the self-satisfaction that many Western scholars have felt, Rodinson is of the opinion that the book carries a militant philosophy and a particular tone which is indicative of his nationalistic views.[10] Hassan (Gai) Eaton considers Edward

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8 Rodinson, M., Europe and the Mystique of Islam, trans. by R. Veinus, (London: I.B. Tauris, 1988), p.117.

9 Ibid.

10 See his comments in Ibid., pp. 131-132, footnote 3.
J.D.J. Waardenburg writes a detailed article on the Orientalists. See his 'Mustashrikun' in: The Encyclopedia of Islam, New Edition, Vol. VII, pp. 735-753.

Said's Orientalism as a 'counter-attack' launched against Western Orientalists.[11] To M'hammad Benabound, the work is the

> ... most scholarly study of the phenomenon up to date, which has placed the problem in a new light.[12]

He then goes on to laud the book as a serious study by an Arab which has achieved tremendous success both in the East and the West.

The debate on Said's works has been enormous and this has been referred to by Fred Halliday in a paper given at the Annual British Society for Middle Eastern Studies Lecture in March 1993.[13]

Halliday notes that Edward Said comprehensively critiqued the dominant writings of Westerners on the Middle East and that has influenced a lot of works which have sought to label such Western studies as

> ... Eurocentric, imperialist, racist, essentialist, and so forth.[14]

In his view, Said's work carries a 'Foucauldain perspective'; where the main motivation behind Orientalist works is seen to be the desire for power, to lord over others.[15]

A serious analysis of what 'Orientalism' is and the efforts of Orientalists in their studies is presented always cautioning that the term is open to abuse. For example he writes that

> Orientalism in Said's usage acquires an almost metaphysical power to pervade very different epochs and genres of expression; in so doing it loses analytic or explanatory purchase.[16]

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11 See his review of Edward Said's other work Covering Islam in IQ Vol. XXIX, No. 1 (First Quarter, 1985), pp. 52-60

12 'Orientalism and the Arab Elite' in IQ XXVI, No. 1 (First Quarter, 1982) (pp. 3-15), see p. 3.

13 See 'Orientalism and its Critics' in BJMES Vol. 20, No. 2, (1993), pp. 145-163.

14 Ibid., p. 148.

15 Ibid., p. 149.

16 Ibid., p. 158.

Criticising Edward Said for being too one sided in his analysis, Halliday argues that

> ... when it comes to hypostasis, stereotyping, the projection of timeless and antagonistic myths, this is in no sense a prerogative of the dominator, but also of the dominated; ...[17]

We might comment here that what Halliday says might be true but these projections of the enemy are forms of art which perhaps, it could be argued, the dominator excels in.

Donald P. Little, in his article entitled 'Three Arab critiques of Orientalism' examines the works of A.L. Tibāwī, Anouar Abdel-Mālik and Edward Said.[18] Criticising Tibāwī for what he understands to be his (Tibāwī's) closure of the door of study of Islam in the face of non-Muslims, Little does not see much difference in Abdel-Malek except that the latter has Marxist inclinations. Hence, colonialism, to Abdel-Malek has always gone hand in hand with Orientalism.[19] One wonders what then happened to Orientalism in the post-colonial period. Perhaps the argument could be likened to the usual arguments about Christian missionary activities which were seen as being carried out in the shadows of the colonialists. Of course, in this case, and possibly in the case of Orientalism as well, colonialism built a foundation for it to thrive.

On Edward Said, Little continues his analysis that he considers all Orientalists as the same and hence dumps them together. He understands Edward Said's arguments to be that all Orientalists

> ... share the same beliefs and assumptions which invariably distort their vision.[20]

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17 Ibid., pp. 160-161.
18 In MW Vol. LXIX, No. 2, Apr. (1979), pp. 110-131.
19 Ibid., pp. 11-118.
20 Ibid., p. 118.

Again he considers Said and Abdel-Mālek as holding a similar view that Orientalism is merely an imperialist tool. Edward Said is accused of not reading wide enough to realise that a large amount of material could not fit his pattern of critique.[21]

Actually, Edward Said himself has realised the controversy his work has generated. He writes in the afterword to the 1995 reissue thus:

> In both America and England (where a separate U.K. edition appeared in 1979) the book attracted a great deal of attention, some of it (as was to be expected) very hostile, some of it uncomprehending, but most of it positive and enthusiastic.[22]

Hostility that was rained on the book perhaps was partly responsible for the enormous publicity the book achieved. The book has now been translated into many languages including Arabic, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Polish, Portuguese, Serbo-Croat, Spanish and Swedish.

Said maintains that the book is not anti-Western as such as it is sometimes argued by its critics and that it should not be misunderstood as projecting a philosophy where the entire Western world is to be seen as an enemy of Islam. He is at pains to refute the imputations laid on him as a

> ... supporter of Islamism or Muslim fundamentalism.[23]

Calling the critiques mostly 'caricatural permutations' of the work, he insists that the book explicitly states that the concepts 'Orient' and 'Occident'

> ... are an odd combination of the empirical and imaginative.[24]

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21 Ibid., p. 121.
22 Said, Orientalism, (1995 reprint), p. 329.
23 Ibid., p. 331.
24 Ibid.

He explains that the hostility the book achieved essentially boils down to a defence of a particular position. He goes on further that:

> Part of the resistance and hostility to books like Orientalism ... stems from the fact that they seem to undermine the naive belief in the certain positivity and unchanging historicity of a culture, a self, a national identity. Orientalism can only be read as a defense of Islam by suppressing half of my argument ...[25]

Edward Said's critique of that perhaps amorphous phenomenon should be understood as a reaction to a particular mode of thinking which sees a

> ... dynamic, and complex human reality from an uncritically essentialist standpoint; ...[26]

a reasoning out attempt in this project seeks to share.

Instead of it being seen as anti-West or even anti-non-Muslim, we implore the reader to view it as an endeavour to redress the situation which has become endemic and has consequences which do not serve a good cause. It is a critique of a system of thought which invariably creates negative reactions to the noble scholars themselves.

It is not anti-West or anti- a particular scholar be it Muir, Margoliouth or Watt to suggest that a particular line of reason or a model used to assess the Prophet of Islam needs rethinking or even entirely wrong. After all, if we are to be faithful to contemporary enlightened scholarship, then critiques or even frequent ones have to be encouraged.

It is with these thoughts in view that we still admire the work of Edward Said and make references to it.

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25 Ibid., p. 333.
26 Ibid.

6.2.2 NORMAN DANIEL.

Much of our arguments in the first chapter were built on the work of Norman Daniel Islam and the West - The Making of an Image which we have briefly commented upon in the discussion under the survey of twentieth century literature.[27] We are returning to it because of its revised edition published in London and New York by the One World Publications in 1993. This new edition has an advantage of an expanded Introduction and also a concluding chapter. Even though the material in the work could be criticised as not being structured as it is found in others, it still offers a large volume of information which we ignore at our own peril in a field such as ours.

In the Introduction, Daniel reiterates the position that there are still difference between Christianity and Islam

> ... so that Christians have always tended to make the same criticisms; and even when, in relatively modern times, some authors have self-consciously tried to emancipate themselves from Christian attitudes, they have not generally been as successful as they thought.[28]

From the outlook of our investigation with respect to the three key British scholars, this has very much been the case. It is true that glimpses of efforts are detected where detachment should have triumphed but more often than not, the inherited attitudes seem to be crawling back. What Daniel calls "war psychosis" could almost always be discerned from the writings of the very age of ours where the scientific method has claimed victory.

Right from the beginning, St. John of Damascus was known to have been the source of a formula for new converts into Christianity heavily laden with pejorative statements against Islam.[29] Such ideas became more sharpened as the years went by and the feared dominance of

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27 Vide supra Chpt. 4.

28 Daniel, Islam and the West, p. 11.

29 Ibid., see p. 13 and also Appendix 'A' which is on the imputation of idolatry to Islam.

Islam seemed to become a reality. It was with this in mind that the caustic polemics and of course its toned down and sophisticated modern versions were developed. The works of Alvarus and Elogius are cases in point to which both Daniel and Southern have referred.[30]

Daniel points out the significance of avoiding the popular opinion of the uninformed masses. In our case, perhaps the remark is valid as well. After all, it is the opinions of the specialists in the field which shape the *Communis Opinio*. The works of Muir, Margoliouth and especially those of Watt have been largely responsible for the general views about Muḥammad in the English speaking West and even in institutions in Muslim communities where English is the main or only medium of instruction.

In his analysis of the survival of Medieval ideas, Daniel points out that in the Medieval era, even though a good amount of knowledge about 'authentic' Islam was available, particular choices were made to serve what was thought to be a crucial end. In the end

> A communal mode of thought developed. Establishing great internal coherence, it represented the doctrinal unity of Christendom in its political opposition to Islamic society, a clear social function that correlated military and intellectual aggression.[31]

Daniel looks at the Medieval Canon and summarises the main concepts regarding Muhammad, the Qur'ān and Islam in general sometimes comparing some values in Islam to those in Christianity. These ideas which were developed mainly in the periods of twelfth to early fourteenth centuries were carried over into later times.[32] Curiously, Daniel points out, these

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30 See Ibid., passim,
and: Southern, R.W., Western Views on Islam, passim.

31 Islam and the West, p. 302.

32 Ibid., pp. 302-309.

distorted images of Muḥammad in particular and Islam in general were so zealously passed on that even later generations

> If they did look at them, ... did so through the eyes of their predecessors; ...[33]

Even in the post-enlightenment period, with the secular and humanist perspectives of the Prophet the difference in attitude has not been too much. Carlyle perhaps shook the British academic world with his bold lecture on Muḥammad but even here the sincerity he is prepared to allow Muḥammad is one which is open to question . Carlyle, despite all his alleged openness and even accusations of pandering to the wishes of Muslims remained rather sceptical or at best ambiguous about the revelation the Prophet received.[34]

Discussing the gradual development of the academic approach to the study of Islam, Daniel comments that the Medieval era were in a particular situation which fostered the development of those distorted ideas. He continues:

> As these reasons ceased to exist, a scientific attitude, that is an attitude of pure science, interested in the thing itself was free to develop. There is still reciprocal distrust between the cultures to which the key is 'secularism'.[35]

Whether the scientific attitude has been applied as it is supposed to be in the literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is a debatable question. As for Daniel's prescription of secularism as the panacea for the rivalry, it has to be received with some disquiet. The issue of secularism vis a vis Islam has been expertly discussed by Syed Muḥammad al-Naquīb al-Aṭṭās.

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33 Ibid., p. 307.

34 Carlyle, Thomas, On Heroes, Hero Worship and the Heroic in History, (New York: 1849).
See also the edition with notes and introduction by Michael K. Goldberg published Berkeley etc.: University of California Press, 1993, esp. the introduction and then the notes on PP. 257-279 on 'The Hero as Prophet',
and: Watt, 'Carlyle on Muḥammad' in HJ Vol. LII, (Oct. 1954 - July 1955), pp. 247-245.

35 Daniel, Islam and the West, p. 323.

He argues that by its very character and definition secularism cannot understand religion and hence it is bound to take a sceptical attitude to things religious which would then not solve problems but perhaps raise new ones.[36]

The reason why Daniel seems to have lost interest in the scientific paradigm comes out in his comment which follows his prescription of secularism. He declares:

> Although I personally believe in the 'scientific' historical ideal of objectivity, I think it certain that it has been infiltrated by subjective ideas of cultural, political and social prejudice. The condemnation by Edward Said in his Orientalism of the assumed superiority and cultural intolerance of the Orientalist tradition in the West was not only justifiable but overdue.[37]

To Daniel, contemporary academics and Orientalist scholars of Islam for that matter often sound patronising and show ample evidence of double standards in their 'scientific' discourse. Such scholars there have not been able to break free from the Medieval legacy of hatred and bias.

In the works of Muir, Margoliouth and Watt on Muḥammad one detects evidence of this albeit they are in different shades of strength.

Referring to some contemporary material, the work of Patricia Crone and Michael Cook[38] comes in for particular criticism for being almost maverick and making a mockery of scholarship by rejecting almost all Muslim sources. Daniel explains that

> ... this is just what Medieval writers did when they hung on to poor evidence that contradicted the Muslim witness.[39]

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36 See: Attas, Syed Naquib al-, Islam and Secularism, (Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia): ABIM, 1978).

37 Islam and the West, p. 324.

38 Hagarism and the Making of the Islamic World, vide supra Chpt. 4 for our comments on this book.

39 Islam and the West, p. 325.

He describes their comments on the Qur'ān as reminiscent of twelfth to fourteenth century scholarship.

Such critique could very well apply to certain aspect of the works of the three authors this project investigates the evidence of which could be gleaned from the foregoing chapters and some of the points we intend raising presently.

In the last section, Daniel devotes some pages to Christian-Muslim Relations in our present times accusing the British Christians as perhaps the most guilty in the retention of some of the Medieval attitudes.

Pointing out the inability of Western Christian opinion to adequately transform itself in accordance with the changing conditions in the era of colonialism, he adds that some Christians even saw the triumph of technology and colonialism as proof of the supremacy of Christianity.

In the work of Montgomery Watt, he sounds like one who views superiority of Western technology in that light.[40]

Daniel reminds of some Medieval attitude in William Muir. He writes:

> A collection of papers by Sir William Muir, founder of Islamic Studies at Edinburgh, which was published in 1897 under the general title The Mohammedan Controversy, includes the remark, soon to be outdated, 'Mohammedanism is perhaps the only undisguised and formidable antagonist of Christianity'.[41]

He then accompanies it with a comment that the statement lacked the foresight of other, perhaps, real adversaries of the Church.

The attitudes of missionaries like W.H.T. Gairdiner, Karl Krumm and Vincent of Beauvais have not been very dissimilar to their Medieval colleagues.[42]

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40 See his Islamic Fundamentalism and Modernity.

41 Islam and the West, p. 327.

42 Ibid.

To Daniel, the efforts for a new understanding of Islam in this century started yielding fruits. With the publication in 1949 of the work of a Muslim convert to Christianity, who sought to find out what lessons Christians could learn from Muslim spirituality.[43] Others who have made advances in the field include Bishop Kenneth Cragg, Jacques Jomier, and Louis Gardet.

From the list, Gardet is given a special place for being more detached than any of the rest.[44]

Daniel observes that in reality

> There has been a considerable advance in such study, not only of Islam itself, but also of the history of relations between the two religions, not only as communities, but as faiths, and here the explicitly Christian contribution its own insights.[45]

Montgomery Watt's contribution to the field is appreciated here and his two-volume work on Muḥammad specially mention. However, Daniel points out that the two works did not do much to radically transform the existing opinions about Muḥammad in Christian psyche. But, he adds, Watt's work

> ... change the emphasis, so that the reader, through the historico-anthropological approach, is drawn into and allowed to some extent to share the Muslim awareness of the Prophet.[46]

Such opinion about Watt is very well placed. Often his reader is taken on a journey to explore what one might call 'authentic' Muslim beliefs sometimes without any critical comments.

See also: Shelly, Michael T., The Life and Thought of W.H.T. Gairdner, 1873-1928 - A Critical Evaluation of a Scholar-Missionary to Islam, unpublished PhD. Thesis, Dept. of Theology, University of Birmingham (U.K.), (1988), esp. Chpt. 3.

43 See, ʿAbd-el-Jalīl, Jean M., Aspects Interieurs de l'Islam, (Paris, 1949).

44 Islam and the West, pp. 329-330.

45 Ibid., p. 330.

46 Ibid., p. 330-331.

There is even an occasion where he declines to make any remark on a topic because it might go against orthodox belief.[47]

Daniel advocates strengthening of the ongoing efforts of Inter-faith dialogue explaining that there is a lot out there that both Muslims and Christians could work for together.

He is of course cautious about what he calls extremists who hold the philosophy that all the ills of the Muslim world are to be attributed to the 'Christian West'. He stresses that the West is no more Christian, an argument he admits is difficult to find sympathy amongst the larger Muslim populace. The main characteristic feature of Western society, he insists, is secularism and not Christianity.

He sees some truth in the Muslim perception though. In a world where many of the scholars who deal with Islam are either ordained ministers or have close links with the Church, and where daily global issues seem to typify Christian ideals, how can people disabuse their minds of this perception that the West is Christian?

In the closing remarks, Daniel calls for new scholarship to see Islam from the Muslim point of view. The empathy, he stresses is required otherwise the estrangement, distrust and survival of caricatural opinions would continue to persist. He explains that the argument does not mean an acceptance of Muḥammad fully and hence embracing Islam but merely for methodological reasons, they have to replace their jaundiced views with the perceptions of Muslims to enable them to obtain a better discernment of Islam and especially of Muḥammad.

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47 See Mecca.
Such a position is problematic in Western Enlightened scholarship though; where the scientific method does not necessarily accept a particular opinion just because it is supposed to be an orthodox view.

These are sentiments we align ourselves with because the thesis itself endeavours to contribute to this call so that the methodological requirements of the scientific study of religion are adhered to as much as possible.

6.3 WILLIAM MUIR.

Albert Hourani in his comments on Muir's works hails him as one yet to be superseded even though he admits that Muir's perspective of Islam was typically traditional Christian.[48]

To Norman Daniel, Muir is not very different from his contemporaries or others in the field who have

> ... maintained an attitude that is not fundamentally sympathetic to Muhammad or to Islam.[49]

In fact, Clinton Bennet has argued that

> ... Muir, who combined the scholar, the colonial administrator with support for missions, influenced Missions in India towards a less conciliatory view of Islam.[50]

His general attitude towards Muslims could be described only as confrontational. The works on islam and on Muḥammad in particular were therefore written in this spirit. In fact, he was known to be a keen supporter of the C.M.S. missionary in India. Karl Pfander who was always associated with polemical discourses against Muslims.

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48 Hourani, A., Europe and the Middle East, (London: Macmillan, 1980), p. 34.

49 Islam and the West, p. 287.

50 See his PhD. thesis entitled Nineteenth Century Christian Views of Islam: Evidence by Six British Approaches, submitted to the Dept. of Theology, University of Birmingham, 1989, p. 25.
See also the published version of the thesis entitled Victorian Images of Islam, (London: Grey Seal Books, 1992), p. 14.

Clinton Bennet has again pointed out this fact and even observed that Muir's work entitled The Mohammedan Controversy

> ... is much more than a description of Pfander's debates.[51]

With such comments, it is difficult to agree with Lyall who describes the book in such glorious terms as being 'systematic' excellent and offers 'sobriety of judgement'.[52]

Muir's subjectivity is displayed by pointing out the kind of yardstick he was going to employ in evaluating Muḥammad. In the preliminary discussions forming the introduction, he calls the Christian yardstick a

> ... purer morality ...[53]

and it is this that he uses in his analysis.

In fact, he states that he was going to apply the

> ... canon of Christian criticism, that any tradition whose origin is not strictly contemporary with the facts related is worthless exactly in proportion to the particularity of detail.[54]

Sir Syed Aḥmad Khān rightly rejects this position and points out that any conclusions to be arrived at from this methodology cannot be anything but false.[55]

Muir confidently tells us that he is dealing with original source material. In fact this information is even incorporated within the title itself but this one great asset of the book is perhaps the root of its weaknesses.

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51 Victorian Images, p. 109.
For more analysis on Muir, his life and outlook on Islam and Muslims, see Chpt. 5 of this work.

52 Vide supra, Chpt. 2, footnote 3.

53 Muir, Life, p. LXV.

54 Ibid., p. Li.

55 Khan, Sir Syed Aḥmad, Life of Muḥammad and Subjects Subsidiary Thereto, (London: Trubner, 1870). See the 1979 reproduction, pp. 311-312.

By having access to the original sources, he owed the academic world (not only the Western or Christian world), a duty to be honest, sincere, fair and consistent. Without doubt, one could conclude that his understanding of the sources and the interpretations he puts on them have had a marked negative effect on his scholarship.

By this, however, we do not intend to reject everything that has been said and hence in the face of bias and prejudice any small amount of fairness has to be acknowledged.

This is exactly why we appreciate his exhaustive analysis of the sources noting some of the inevitable problems which existed with the traditional accounts.

We ourselves have pointed out that Muslim scholarship does not gloss over this and the whole elaborate science of Ḥadīth criticism exists as evidence of that.[56]

It is because of the intricacy of the traditions question that Muir falls back on the theory that unfavourable comments about Muḥammad could be true but favourable ones especially from Muḥammad's followers need to be treated with care.[57] The blanket application of this theory which came to achieve currency even in latter work of Watt and others is an abuse of methodology.

Muir seems to have missed the opportunity of seeing Islam in the perspective of Muslims, a principle that scientific scholarship advocates. He hence uses a methodology which exhibits a continuation of the Medieval attitudes.

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56 See: Siddīqī, M.Z., Hadīth Literature - Its Origins, Development and Special Features, (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993).
ʿAzamī, M.M., al-, On Schacht's Oringins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence, (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993).
--------. Studies in Early Hadith Literature, (Beirut, 1968).
Nisabūrī, Hakim al-, al-Mustadrak 'ala al-Sahīhayn, (Hyderabad, 1334-1342).
--------. Ma'rifa 'Ulūm al-Hadīth, (Cairo, 1937).
Junyboll, G.H.A., The Authenticity of the Tradition Literature, (Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1969).
--------. Muslim Tradition - Studies in Chronology, Provenance and Authorship of early Hadīth, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

57 Muir, Life, see esp. pp. Li-Lviii.

By looking at the various themes he selects and the tone of the discourse, perhaps our hypothesis that change in methodology *per se* does not necessarily imply change in attitude seems justified.

By repeating Medieval Christian arguments and exhibiting their attitudes, Muir has made objectivity gravely elusive in his book. His emphasis on wars, Muḥammad's sexuality and so-called fabrication of revelation leave much to be desired. Very important themes the treaty of Muḥammad signed with the tribes of Madīna (usually called the Madīnan Charter or the Madīnan Constitution), honesty of the Prophet, his commitment to strict monotheism, compassion, the treaty of Hudaibiyah and others are either not mentioned at all or treated very casually.

The argument being raised here becomes reinforced if one looks at his other work which was supposed to be an abridgement of the main volume on the biography. This is meant to contain all the essentials of the main work.[58]

Muir's Christian background weighs heavily on him and one senses this in the way he deals with revelation and inspiration in Islam.[59] His understanding of religious experience is not very different from that of his co-religionists and contemporaries like Rev. Canon Sell and Rev. W.H. Temple Gairdner.

Sell for example, states that inspiration in Islam is

> ... quite illogical and entirely contrary to the inspiration in the Bible.[60]

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58 See his, Mahomet and Islam: A Sketch of the Prophet's Life from Original Sources and a Brief Outline of His Religion, (1895).

59 Muir, Life, see Chpt. 3.

60 Sell, Inspiration, (1930), p. 64.
See also Gairdner, Inspiration - Dialogue, (1909), p. 47.

In the Christian concept, expertly explained by Gairdner and Sell, and which would have been accepted by Muir as valid, Jesus Christ becomes the *'Ne Plus Ultra'* (the highest point, fulfilment) of revelation. The Muslim concept of revelation during which the medium's life becomes seized-up completely by the Divine does not make much sense in Christianity.

In the Christian understanding, the Prophet maintains his composure and is in his full senses while being inspired and that is why he is fully responsible for whatever he utters and his words cannot be said to be those of the Divine.

One seems to hear Muir echoing Gairdner that

> It is impossible for us to accept any revelation subsequent to Christ. The Word was made flesh - what need of further words? God, after that He spake to the fathers in the Prophets hath at last spoken to us in a SON - how then go back to any prophet? No, it is impossible.[61]

Muir therefore seems heavily constrained in his assessment in spite of his scholarly capabilities and hence sees almost everything about Muḥammad to have mere human meaning.

But that is not the point at all. The issue is not whether to accept Muḥammad as a true prophet or not. What is of significance to us here is proper application of sound scholarship so that the object being analysed becomes recognisable in the light of the original sources that Muir himself claims he had access to.

The book's concentration on the theory that Islam is a garbled form of earlier monotheistic faiths, the pathological theory, and that the messages the Prophet received were from his subconscious mind and not the Divine, and the Satanic Verses all point to attitudes which could be traced to the Medieval period.[62]

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61 Gairdner, Inspiration, p. 55.

62 See Muir, Life, pp. xcviii, 6-7, 19-20, 80-86 and Chpt. 10.

His comments on the *Isrā'* and *Mi'rāj* experience of Muḥammad is symptomatic of derision.[63] Here, as we have pointed out in the main discussion, Muir is inconsistent in his outlook on experiences which are quite similar. We are pointing at the doctrine of transfiguration of Jesus and even the bodily ascension of Elijah which, as a Christian, he would have no qualms about.

Again, mention is to be made of Muir's use of the miracle criterion to assess Muḥammad. Daniel has elaborated on this in his work and it seems Muir is rehearsing Medieval opinions again.[64]

Further, Muir, with his Christian yardstick then censures Muḥammad's sexual behaviour accusing him of violating a Christian Canon.[65]

We have dealt with some of these issues in the text itself and therefore we do not find it valuable to repeat them here. Again, in our concluding remarks at the end of the chapter, we have reiterated that Muir has not been able to divorce himself from the Communal Opinion dating from the Medieval period.

Hence, even though in some instances, which we have noted in our concluding remarks, he positively appreciated Muḥammad as the sources available suggest, his work often lacks the merits of sound academic scholarship.

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63 Ibid. see Chpt. 7.

64 See Ibid., pp. LViii-Lxx; pp. 126-127.
See also Daniel, Islam and the West.

65 Muir, Life, pp. 178 & 292 ff.
It is arguable here whether polygamy is 'forbidden' in Christianity as such.

6.4 DAVID SAMUEL MARGOLIOUTH.

In our discussion on Margoliouth, we have been quite analytical and therefore there will be no purpose in going back to recount those remarks. We, however, would like to pick out some significant points.

If Muir, writing almost to encourage the missionary propaganda of Karl Pfander in India has failed to live up to his own promises of objectivity, one would not expect Margoliouth to fall into the same category.

With his position as a British Colonial officer having to pursue the "unofficial official" British policy which Clinton Bennet reminds us of, Muir was in a rather different situation as compared to Margoliouth.[66]

Again, in terms of academic standing, perhaps Muir and Margoliouth are worlds apart and hence one might, quite understandably, excuse Muir some of his lapses.[67]

In addition to these one might note that Margoliouth's work appeared almost half a century after Muir and therefore a more judicious use of fair and sound academic principles would be justifiably expected.

Being a *cause celebre* in the field among his contemporaries, Margoliouth's attitude should markedly be better than that of Muir.[68] In fact, his expertise in Islamic languages has been hailed highly but a significant note is also made that this mastery made him a bit conceited always insisting that his view was right.[69]

Granted this observation, one might be sceptical about Margoliouth's preparedness to be fair and just with the material he deals with.

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66 See Bennet, Victorian Images, Introduction, p. 14.

67 Compare Margoliouth's background in this chapter with Muir's.
See Ibid.

68 See the comments from the DNB cited in supra footnoes 4 & 5 of Chpt. 3.

69 See supra, 'The Man Margoliouth' in Chpt. 3.

The argument basically is that expertise in a language in itself does not necessarily guarantee objectivity when the expert is working on material in that language. Therefore, Margoliouth might be aware of all the extant classical material on the Prophet's biography and could delve into all its intricacies but at the end of the day, his interpretation cannot be guaranteed as objective. After all, in the days of the Prophet there were perhaps greater experts in the Arabic language and yet they scorned Muḥammad because of particular motives.

In the Medieval age, even those scholars who could be described as well acquainted with Arabic hose to interpret Muḥammad the way they did.

One could discern in Margoliouth's Mohammed that, his expertise has not guaranteed fairness.

It is perhaps pertinent to point out here, as we have done in the case of Muir, that one is not demanding that his expertise should have led him to accept Muḥammad and impliedly become a Muslim as such. Our argument is that the expertise should have contributed to a fairer assessment of the Prophet.

In his discussion on the sources, Margoliouth's demand that scholars have to go to the original biographical sources to have a better appreciation of Muḥammad is, in no doubt, commendable. So it is with his detailed discussion of the scholarship in existence at his time.[70]

In fact, he makes a bold statement and that is where one needs to take him on. He writes that the existing

> ... works are ordinarily designed to show the superiority or inferiority of Mohammed's religion to some other system; an endeavour from which it is hoped that this book will be found to be absolutely free.[71]

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70 See supra 3.2.1.

71 Margoliouth, Mohammed, p. vii.

Right in the next few pages, in his discussion of pre-Islamic Arabian history, he accuses Islam of adding to the already volative place by introducing religious zealotry.[72] This opinion goes against history in the sense that Islam came rather to ameliorate the situation and did not increase the insecurity of the place. In fact, the whole issue of Hijrah to Madīna is primarily linked with the question of security and peace. This opinion has nothing to do with belief, it is a matter of history and Margoliouth, on this particular score has not been fair with the material.

In the choice of themes, his interest in the pathological theory and his view that this is confirmed in the State of Muḥammad in periods of receiving revelation go to confirm that Margoliouth's objectivity is questionable. He is therefore not very different from many of the scholars he criticises as being unscholarly.[73]

One would have expected Margoliouth to show more perspicacity on this subject. The scholar opens himself up to the charge of falsehood by commenting that a particular Qur'ānic order, which he sees as coming form Muḥammad himself had to be retracted. As we have already remarked, the view does not have any truth in it.[74] He even claims that the Companions of Muḥammad used to collect the water he had used for ablution and drink. Later, he claims, Muḥammad

> ... took to bottling up the precocious liquid and sending it, after the style of saints, to new adherents.[75]

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72 Ibid., p. 2.
73 See supra 3.3.1
74 See supra 3.3.2
75 Margoliouth, Mohammed, p. 216.
See our comments in Ibid.

Margoliouth does not question the historicity of this story in the light of the personality of the Prophet. He merely regurgitates it because he might have found it in an old relic. This approach is not very helpful in sound scholarship.

His understanding of the Qur'ān is a bit questionable and sometimes the vocabulary he applies to it is not academic.[76] His denial of the existence of metaphysical issues in the Qur'ān is not justified. One might not believe in the Hindu Scriptures for example, but scholarly rectitude requires that one acknowledges the enormous metaphysical concerns they carry.

Margoliouth's charge of Imposture against Muḥammad again reminds one of the Medieval thoughts. Even though he rejects some of the outdated stories peddled during the age of 'war propaganda', he does not go far to ensure fairness.[77]

The doubts he casts upon the visit to Waraqah Ibn Naufal is strange and even more is his reasoning for doubting it. For his reasoning that because Waraqah does not appear in the later narratives, it could have been concocted by Muslims to support the authenticity of Muḥammad has no support from the general from the general material available. We have already dealt with this and pointed out that the premise of the reasoning is faulty.[78]

Margoliouth's imputation of idolatrous practices against Muḥammad looks very much like Medieval polemic. Norman Daniel recounts a series of these charges which were manufactured in those emotive periods.[79] Rosalind Hill, in her paper entitled 'Crusading Warfare: A Camp-Followers View 1097-1120', notes how the prosecutors of the Crusades had to rely on these fanciful stories in order to give a morale boost to the Christian soldiers who

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76 See supra 3.3.2
Cf. his article on 'Muḥammad' in <u>Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics</u>.

77 See his discussion on Muḥammad's prophethood in <u>Mohammed</u>, p. 86 ff.

78 See supra 3.3.3

79 See Daniel, <u>Islam and the West</u>, esp. Appendix 'A' devoted to 'Imputation of Idolatory to Islam' and passim and supra 3.3.4

interpreted the wars as theologically necessary since they were fighting against idol worshippers.[80]

Relying much on the Patrologia Latina and the Gesta Francorum Hill points out that

> The belief in Moslem Polytheism certainly outlasted the Crusade and survived in the Latin states.[81]

This is very true and one can argue that vestiges are seen in Margoliouth's work.

Another theme around which Margoliouth uses a high level of the speculative theory is the infamous 'Satanic Verses' issue. As we have argued, it is not merely the story itself but the skilful way he attempts to find a basis for it. Without any solid grounds, Margoliouth with his expertise should have at least questioned the accounts.

Since the prophethood of Muḥammad cannot be genuine, and he was an impostor, then those ideas which sounds acceptable should have been borrowed from the existing faiths. Margoliouth does not divorce himself from these old arguments that without Judaism and Christianity or at least their ideas in various forms in Arabia there would have been no Prophet. This reasoning has, of course, like many others lived beyond Margoliouth. In the whole analysis, conjecture has been the main ingredient. However, he intensely rejects any idea that Islam is a Christian heresy.[82] One sees a contradiction here. If for argument's sake Muḥammad relied on the Bible or on Christian and Jewish teachers to establish his religion and if his central ideas are wrong as far as main Christian teachings are concerned, then what is the objection that it is a wrong form of Christianity?

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80 See: Proceedings of the Battle Conference of Anglo-Norman Studies, R. Allen Brown (ed.), (Ipswich (U.K.): The Boydell Press, 1979), pp. 75-83.

81 Ibid., p. 82.

82 See supra 3.3.6 Note his controversy with Forster on the 'Islam - a Christian Heresy' issue.

As for the morals of Muḥammad, one reading Margoliouth's assessment cannot distinguish it from the Medieval Church fathers who had an axe to grind and therefore the philosophy was to put the enemy in the worst of shape. Even the language he sometimes uses is a bit unbecoming of such a highly respected academic.[83]

Even with the behaviour of Muḥammad at the fall of Makkah which he himself appreciates the Prophet's magnanimity, he finds a reason for that. He asserts that Muḥammad was looking beyond Makkah and that was why he was so merciful.[84]

The comments on the Prophet's sexuality begins with a sympathetic note but soon runs into sever censures reminiscent of the days of ignorance mixed up with animosity.

Muḥammad is pictured by Margoliouth as a man of bad temper and violence again digging deep into the archive of the subculture built over the ages. Despite all claims that this work is going to break fresh ground, this characterisation does not support that. In the work edited by Samir and Nielsen this question is expertly dealt with.[85]

If Muir is criticised for omitting the Madīnan Charter, Margoliouth should be given credit for finding it significant to discuss. Acknowledging that it was an important document primarily meant for security of Madīna and its environs is commendable.

However, even here, the implications of the charter as far Muḥammad's personality is concerned is clearly absent. But, any analysis of the Prophet's biography ought to take cognisance of what issues like the Madīnan Charter tell us about the Prophet and his mission.

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83 See for examaple, Moḥammed, p. 149 ff.

84 See our argument in supra 3.3.7

85 See, supra 3.3.9
See also, Samir, Khalil Samir & Nielsen, Jorgen S., : Christian Arabic Apologetics During the Abbāsid Period 750-1258, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994), esp. Hugh Goddard"s 'The Persistence of Medieveal themes in Modern Christian-Muslim discussion in Egypt', Chpt. 10.

The Jewish question receives a very exhaustive attention and even though on mostly detects Jewish sympathy once a while we come across statements which could be described as anti-Semitic. The Jewish background of Margoliouth could explain this. He often identifies himself with the Jews but coming from a family of converts to Christianity, this other side also shows. While charges Muḥammad with violence against the Jews, he also accuses the Jews of being stupid enough not to break off with Muḥammad especially when the change in *qiblah* came.[86]

When he comes up to discuss Muḥammad's relationship with Christians he becomes emotional and of course this makes him speak even less as an academic.[87]

The Hudaibiyyah treaty also receives much attention and he perhaps allows more space to it than many of his contemporaries. However, like it was with the Madīnan Charter, he avoids comments on what it means as far as Muḥammad's personality is concerned.

His observation regarding the letters the Prophet sent to various eminent personalities of the day as embodying a programme of world conquest is unfortunate. Even here, the Jewish issue crops up where he alleges that Heraclius in a way like Muḥammad because the Prophet had massacred Jews. Considerations like these cloud whatever fairness there is.

When Margoliouth looks at the general character of Muḥammad, he makes some fair comments. The greedy, violent, power-hungry, bad tempered robber-chief suddenly becomes affectionate, abstemious and honest. This does not seem to match the bulk of the discussion, though.

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86 See Moḥammed, p. 247 ff. and supra, 3.3.12.

87 See his comments on the visit of the Christian Delegation of Najrān and also his talk at the St. Aldate's Church, Oxford. Supra 3.3.13.

Margoliouth, having reflected Muḥammad's teachings as having anything to do with Christianity, has to put him somewhere; hence the proto-Mormon argument. As we have pointed out in our discussion, Margoliouth, with his academic stature should have known the spuriousness of the theory.[88]

We find this very similar to the Medieval argument of anit-Christ which both Muḥammad and the Pope were supposed to be.[89].

In our concluding remarks to the chapter we reiterate our hypothesis that Medieval ideas continued to survive and also that change in methodology *per se* does not necessarily lead to change in attitude. Margoliouth's work does not disprove these assertions.

6.5 WILLIAM MONTGOMERY WATT.

In both Muir and Margoliouth we detected serious lapses in interpretation of data on the biography of the Prophet.

One however has to take into account the period in which both of them wrote. The constant reference of Margoliouth to Muir suggest that that was the main serious academic study of the age. It hence shows the paucity of sound material.

In the case of Watt, the situation is very different. Writing, again, almost half a century after Margoliouth and hence almost a century after Muir, Watt falls into a very different category.

In the time of Watt and certainly, with his students or predecessors, Christian biographical approach to the Prophet has made a significant shift from confrontation to dialogue. This assertion is borne by the enormous twentieth century literature we have surveyed

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88 See supra 3.3.17

89 See Daniel, Islam and the West, pp. 210-212 and Rosalind Hill, 'Crusading Warfare', p. 82.

as a prelude tot he discussion of Watt. This survey would be extremely difficult for the periods of Muir and Margoliouth which is indicative of the dearth of English material. Therefore, since our project deals mainly with English sources we have thought it prudent to avoid that.

The tremendous change in the level of discussion and the rapid growth in material in the early part of the century and certainly after the first could be attributed to several reasons. The reasons might include the situation in Egypt in the twenties and thirties with the rise of people like Muḥammad Husayn Haykal and Ṭāha Husayn. Again, the 1920 Indian scene and the Khilāfat Movement with all their manifestations could not be left out. Further, the collapse of the Khilāfat with the triumph of secularism in Turkey together with the Middle Eastern situation played a significant role in putting Islam and the Muslims on the Western agenda. The growing profile of Islam dictated the interest in Islam and Muḥammad for that matter.

Watt was hence writing in a period of great development in the field and hence we are justified in spending much more time on him than the others. Again, as we have indicated in our rationale for choosing him, the impact of Watt on the English -speaking students of Islam and the biography of the Prophet for that matter is more pervasive than any of his predecessors or contemporaries.[90]

But if Watt has been fortunate enough to be born in this period of tremendous advance in scholarship, then primarily because of that, our level of critique has to be more stringent as compared to the others. Watt's books have been reviewed seriously by various scholars and we refer to some of these here.

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90 See supra - the discussion on 'Watt - The Man and his Intellectual Biograhpy' and 'The Choice of Watt'.

Alfred Guillaume reviews his first book (Muḥammad at Mecca) and calls it a useful project. He notes Watt's concerns with the economic theory as the basis of the whole episode in Makkah. He writes:

> Dr. Watt's observations on the stresses and strains of social and economic solidarity brought about by financial alliances bring to the fore a factor of considerable importance, though it is possible to exaggerate it.[91]

He is however critical of Watt's theory of the level of individualism and what he (Watt) calls 'tribal humanism' in pre-Islamic Arab society. He points out that Watt's suggestion that without belief in immortality, it would have been impossible for the society to pass on from 'tribal humanism' to individual humanism

> ... seems to me to go beyond the evidence.[92]

Perhaps, Watt's attempt to be fair to Muḥammad concerns his view on his sincerity and here, Guillaume censures him for failing as a historian. This has to do with Watt's insistence that there is no plausible evidence to suggest that the Qur'ān was Muḥammad's own composition.[93] To Guillaume, the historian's proper position is that the Qur'ān is Muḥammad's own composition.

On this, Watt's position is distinctively an improvement in scholarship and a significant shift away from the Medieval position which Guillaume seems to be holding onto. Guillaume's

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91 Review in MW XLIV, No. 1, (Jan. 1954) (pp. 49-51), p. 49.
92 Ibid., cf. Watt, Mecca, pp. 16-20.
93 See, Mecca, pp. 55-58.
Cf. Guilllaume's review, pp. 49-50.

final statement is however complimentary. He writes:

> Whether one agrees with Dr. Watt or not, it is beyond doubt that he has written a stimulating and informative book which will provoke both thought and further research. The excurses which must have given the author much labour, are of great value.[94]

This same volume of Watt is also reviewed by W. Arafat.[95] Arafat, noting Watt's claims to neutrality on theological issues, reviews the book as a work of history. Welcoming the economic analysis of pre-Islamic Makkah, Arafat however cautions that Watt has run into too much theorising on this without marshalling enough evidence.

On Watt's theory on individualism and tribal humanism which Guillaume also comments, Arafat remarks that there is a danger of forcing the argument. He point out that

> ... individualism seems deep rooted in the Arab, and it is a fact that individualism and tribal solidarity existed side by side.[96]

He accuses Watt of relying on too many theories and hypotheses which are not conclusively proved.

Watt generally thinks that the subject of persecution of the Muslims in Makkah is exaggerated.[97] On this, Arafat criticises Watt that it is not fair to suppose that the Muslims emigrated due to 'base motives' and not because of persecution. He explains that perhaps the level of the persecution could not be put on the same scale as that endured by the Christians in Rome but that does not reduce the severity of it within that context.[98]

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94 Guillaume's review, pp. 50-51.
95 See, IQ Vol. 1, No. 3, (Oct. 1954), pp. 182-184.
96 Ibid., p. 182.
97 See, Mecca, Chpt. 5 esp. pp. 117-133.
98 See, Arafat's review pp. 183-184.

Again, Arafat reacting to Watt's acceptance of pre-Islamic poetry of the Sīra, calls this a dangerous position to take. He elaborates thus:

> The poem attributed to Abū Ṭālib, which Dr. Watt is inclined to accept is mostly doubted by I.H. himself and rejected by his authorities.[99]

Could it be that Watt misread the text or forced his own conclusions on it. If the account is mostly doubted by the same authority Watt cites (Ibn Hishām), why Watt, with his knowledge, accepts it is not clear.

As a further evidence of Watt's different level of scholarship and the usual scope of his work, Arafat in the end appreciates the book in the following statement:

> There are many points in this book for praise and comment. The excurses and some of the discussions are extremely valuable. Even if one finds much to disagree with, it is a great merit of the book that it should stimulate interest or provide further research.[100]

A.L. Tibāwī reviews Watt's third volume on the biography and notes that Watt is a scholar who has tried to change the face of negative scholarship against Islam.[101] He is however of the opinion that Watt is often too speculative sometimes to the point of incredulity.[102]

Since this third volume is an abridgement of the two earlier volumes on Muḥammad, the review by Tibāwī could offer us a glimpse of his assessment of the two main volumes.

Tibāwī points to instances of contradiction. The specific example has to do with the prophethood of Muḥammad and his sincerity. While Watt acknowledges these, he still argues

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99 Ibid., p. 184.
Cf. Watt, Mecca, p. 121 (nb. I.H. = Ibn Hishām).

100 Arafat review, p. 184.

101 Muḥammad, Prophet and Statesman (1961), see the review in IQ VI, Nos. 3 & 4, July-Oct. (1961), pp.127-128.

102 Tibawi's review Ibid., p. 127.

about the roots of Muḥammad's teachings being Biblical and speculates that Muḥammad made attempts to make his religion Jewish. He (Tibāwī) then writes:

> The lavish, if cautious use of 'perhaps', 'may', and 'if', followed only too often by far-reaching conclusions, is a disturbing feature of this scholarly work.

He continues:

> There is a great deal of intelligent guess-work which sounds reasonable and may be acceptable, but apart form a solid core of factual survey, this work contains too much speculative deduction. No the least significant of these deductions is the so-called Judaeo-Christian 'origins'.[103]

Tibawi points out that since Watt should have been aware that the theory of Judaeo-Christian 'origins' of Islam is alien to Muslims, as a dispassionate historian he should have stated what the Muslim position on this matter is.

This matter raises the question of method in historical inquiry. If the historian is to 'let the text speak for itself' or merely "let history speak for itself" as Koch has reminded us,[104] then Watt, in this case, has not allowed history to speak.

In discussing the Madīnan chapter of the Prophet's life Watt often makes the Prophet look like someone who had the conquest of the whole of Arabia and beyond his primary aim.[105]

Tibāwī however notes an inconsistency in that Watt at the same time rejects the letters Muḥammad was noted to have sent to various rulers and eminent people of the then known world as spurious.[106] If the man already has it as his life ambition to bring the whole world under his power, then this is one of the most natural courses of action he could have taken.

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103 Ibid.

104 See Konstantin, supra footnote 4.

105 See Watt Prophet and Statesman, pp. 218-221.

106 Ibid., see pp. 194-195.

In our own analysis of Watt's material, we have found it necessary to put him in perspective by presenting a general survey of English material on the market. In the survey, on e can see the marked changes that have occurred within the period.

On Watt and his intellectual biography, effort has been made to have a quick review of most of Watt's works and these sections, there is a general positive reaction to Watt as a scholar who is more sympathetic to Islam and Muslims than his predecessors and contemporaries. The general picture is that Watt has a different approach form either Muir or Margoliouth.

Even from the selection of themes and emphasis, Watt uses a more judicious methodology than both Muir and Margoliouth.

If it is possible to describe Muir's work as containing a lot of typical Christian missionary propaganda and Margoliouth's just a slight improvement on Muir, Watt's could be seen as a more serious attempt at writing history. Despite evidence of Christian attitudes, forced conclusions and skilful imaginative reconstruction of events, Watt is perhaps the only one among the three who endeavours to detach himself as a historian. We now turn to some specific issues of detail.

One of the greatest faults of Watt is casting doubt on many of the classical traditions, allowing less credit to contemporary Islamic scholarship and hence relying often on his own logic. As pointed out, Watt claims that Muslim intellectuals have, from the classical times, been living in intellectual isolation and have not studied other religions and cultures.[107] The view is explicitly contradicted by a line of scholarship brought together by Tarīf Khālidi's recent study of Muslim historiography.[108]

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107 See Watt, 'Islamic Attitudes to Other Religions' in SM Vol. 42, pp. 245-255.

108 See Khālidi, Tarīf: Arabic Histoircal Thought in the Classical Age, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

A criticism of out-of touchness could be made of his view about the lack of modern Muslim critical thought (except Fazlur Rahmān and Muḥammad Arkoun).[109] The works of the late Ismāil R. al-Fārūqī and the publications of the International Institute of Islamic Thought (I.I.I.T.) in Herndon (Virginia, U.S.A.) and many others belie Watt's position and betrays his inability to keep abreast with such scholarship. Some people might even argue that Watt respects only Fazlur Rahmān and Arkoun because their views are sometimes not wholly acceptable by many Muslim scholars and are thought to be 'Westernised' Muslim scholars.[110]

Watt's frequent preparedness to put a question mark on Muslim accounts makes him doubt the age of Khadījahat the time of marriage to Muḥammad and even doubt that Gabriel appeared to Muḥammad in Makkah.[111]

In our modern times, even without the use of In-vitro Fertilization (I.V.F.) it is not strange and definitely not miraculous for a woman at the age beyond forty to give bitth.

As for the issue of Gabriel's appearance it is just not true that there is no mention of Gabriel in the pre-Madīnan revelations. The reasons why Watt does not accept this basic fact is difficult to fathom to put it mildly. Gabriel certainly appears by name in Sūrah Taḥrīm (66:4) a 'Makkan' surah.[112]

As we have noted in our earlier remarks, Watt is amore cautious historian though and often one comes across evidence of this. He is prepared to take his own Western contemporaries to task for their unfairness in the application of critical scholarship to Muḥammad. He points out that Muḥammad received the worst press in the West among all

109 See Watt's article 'Islam and Peace' in SM Vol. 39, pp. 167-178.

110 For example, see the opinion expressed on this by A. Qamaruddīn in his review of Watt's Islamic Fundamentalism and Modernity in IQ XXX, No. 2, 2nd Quarter, 199, pp. 140-145.

111 See his Mecca, pp. 38-52.

112 See also the Holy Qūr'an; sūrahs 81:19-24; 16:102; 70:4; 78:38; 97:4; and passim.

personalities in history. He hence rejects the dominant Western theory that the Qur'ān is Muḥammad's own composition.[113]

However, Watt frequently exhibits contradiction in his opinion. Not long after rejecting the theory of the Qur'ān being Muḥammad's own work he pushes across the view that Muḥammad had a way of 'inducing' the revelation. Even though his prudent attitude makes him say that the topic is irrelevant to the theologian in the assessment of the authenticity of the revelation, it does nothing to remove the charge that he accepts the argument.[114]

Zuntz has pointed out the problems encountered by a theologian when he assumes the garb of a historian. As Zuntz expressed of Koch, one detects that the historian in Watt struggles with the theologian in him.[115] A typical example of this is where he (Watt) refrains from analysing a conception because, according to him, it is sensitive in Muslim theology.[116] There is another clear evidence of inconsistency here and Watt opens himself up to this accusation.

Another question mark against Watt's scholarship is his handling of the question of Satanic Verses especially regarding his speculations about the motives of Muḥammad. The whole tone is reminiscent of Muir and Margoliouth whose scholarship Watt does not positively appreciate.[117] As for his views on the persecution suffered by Muslims in Makkah, Arafat has dealt with it and we do not want to repeat the arguments here except to say that Watt does not state sound academic reasons for playing down the traditional sources.[118]

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113 See Watt, Mecca, pp. 52-53.
This is why he is prepared to criticise his own teacher R.Bell for holding this opinion.
See Watt's Bell's Introduction in the Intellectual Biography.

114 Mecca, pp. 57-58.

115 See Zuntz: 'The Theologian as Historian'.

116 See Mecca, p. 83.

117 See Ibid., p. 104 ff.

118 Ibid., p. 117 ff.
Cf. Arafat's review of Mecca. See supra.

In fact, in general Watt's emphasis on the business acumen of the Prophet within the mercantile environment in Makkah leaves much of the Prophet's religious personality in a shade.[119] Again, Guillaume has warned of the danger of overplaying the economic tune. Watt however, often revisits this theme which makes him run into the danger being warned of.[120] This discussion could be tied up with the charge that Muḥammad was primarily moved by material considerations other than the spiritual. In an elaborate discussion sometimes bordering on emotional response, Zafar ʿAlī Qureshī deals with this issue.[121]

This attitude of Watt in playing down the spiritual aspects of Muḥammad's life also comes up in his discussions on the battles the Muslims fought. he often assigns secular reasons for the outcome of such confrontations. In such issues, Watt is seen as a secular historian. For example on the battle of Badr, he discounts the miraculous help as a true historian. However, Watt, who accepts the Qur'ān as a source of history does not state why he rejects the Qur'ānic reasons for the outcome of the battles.[122]

By titling his first chapter on the Madīnan era 'The Provocation of the Quraysh', Watt makes the persecuted and 'exiled' Muslims look aggressors. One needs to admit that the killing of al-Ḥaḍramī was probably the *Causa Proxima* of the battle as Shiblī Nu'mānī points out but one has to look at the *Causa Remota* as well; that is the events before the al-Nakhlah incident.

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119 See Mecca, Chpt. 1.

120 See supra: The discussion on the Intellectual Biography where in many papers of Watt this theme always comes up.

121 Qureshī, Zafar ʿAlī, Prophet Muḥammad and His Western Critics - A Critique of W. Montgomery Watt and others, (Lahore: Idarah Ma'arif Islami, 1992), 2 vols., see Chpt. 5.
See other parts of this book for some rather interesting points despite its general emotive tone.

122 See Medina, Chpt. I & II.
For example, in pp. 65-66, Watt carries a general thought that material motives were the main principles behind the Prophet's activites in Madīnah.
Cf. Qur'ānic references to the battle of Badr, e.g., Surahs 3:12-13, 121-127; 8:5-19, 42-51; 18:58.

If Watt had done that, Muḥammad would not have been portrayed as being provocative in the scouting of the environs of Makkah.

The problem arises because of Watt's forced interpretation of the cardinal concept used in the text تَرَصَّدُوا (*Taraṣṣadū*). His rejection of the meaning of this word as "keep a watch", and insistence on translating it as "lay in ambush" is not sound according to the available dictionaries. "Lay in ambush" is indeed a forced interpretation of this concept.[123]

On the issue of embassies the Prophet sent to various lands, Watt again allows speculation to overshadow the importance of such historical issues. In fact, he is of the opinion that those said in the classical texts to have been sent to the emperors of Byzantium and Persia are false. His main argument is just that these were too powerful for Muḥammad to have made such attempts.[124] The rationale for this opinion is very lame in the light of the tremendous successes Muḥammad had achieved in Arabia and even without the religious consideration he might have had the boost that nothing could possibly stand in his way. If the religious argument of the universal consciousness of the Prophet's mission is added, then Watt's reasoning looks shallow

We commend Watt for discussing the al-Hudaibiyah episode with finer details but it is strange that a scholar of his calibre ignores a discussion on the lessons one learns from the Prophet's behaviour at al-Hudaibiyah.[125] Without any attachment to faith, one discerns that the Prophet showed true elements of faith, diplomacy, fore-sightedness, patience and sincerity. Watt, like some of his predecessors, does not find it worthwhile to discuss these.

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123 See Medina, p. 7.

124 Ibid., p. 40 ff.

125 See Ibid., p. 46 ff.

Watt's views about Muḥammad's attempts to model Islam on Judaism and hence failing in that he turned against the Jews is a repetition of some of the old theories.[126]

In his review of Watt's Muḥammad-Prophet and Statesman, Tibāwī has already commented on this theory as part of the speculative theory.[127]

Watt's ideas here form a prelude to the larger issue of Muḥammad's relationship with the Jews and it is here that the analysis turns a bit scathing. The elaborate discussion on the intellectual and physical attacks on the Jews by Muḥammad leaves no picture of the Prophet other than an aggressive, bad-tempered person who brings everybody under his power by fair or foul means.[128] One of the greatest problems in any modern work on the Sīra is the pressure of anachronism where post-enlightenment criteria are used in judging pre-enlightenment attitudes. We see Watt's conclusions on the confrontations in Madina . as anachronistic. He is not able to see the issue in the light of seventh century Arabia. Even in our own modern times, the two World Wars and the recently glorified Gulf War without mentioning the 'divinely sanctioned Crusades' should teach us a lot about how to handle the seventh century confrontations in Madīna .

Whatever the situation, it goes against the grain for fairness and objectivity to paint Muḥammad in the colours Watt has done. In fact, another inconsistency is detected in the application of principles. Watt himself questions European critique on the morality of Muḥammad and points out a fault in the attitude of applying a modern European criteria to the

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126 See Ibid., pp. 198-208.

127 See Tibāwī's review, supra.
See also: Khalifa, Moḥammed, The Sublime Qur'ān and Orientalism,(London & New York: Longman, 1983), esp. Chpt. 7.

128 See Watt, Medīna, p. 205 ff.

seventh century Arab prophet.[129] One wonders why he does not remember this in his criticism of Muḥammad's dealing with the Jews.

In the general assessment of the personality of the Prophet, one sees a different Watt. He, in a way, defends Muḥammad against what he considers irresponsible or misplaced attacks by some scholars.[130]

Nevertheless, his lapses show up in his concluding remarks in Muḥammad-Prophet and Statesman where he comments on the prophetic consciousness of Muḥammad. He sees Muḥammad as one of those with creative imagination and, here, strangely puts him in the same category as Adolf Hitler. He writes:

> In Adolf Hitler the creative imagination was well developed, and his ideas had a wide appeal, but it is usually held that he was neurotic and that those Germans who followed him most devotedly became infected by his neurosis. In Muhammad, I should hold, there was a welling up of the creative imagination, and the ideas thus produced are to a great extent true and sound. It does not follow, however, that all the Qur'ānic ideas are true and sound. In particular there is at least one point at which they seem to be unsound - the idea that 'revelation' or the product of the creative imagination is superior to normal human traditions as a source of bare historical fact.[131]

We have cited the full length of this rather long opinion primarily for the reader to have a full view of the reasoning. In the rather propagandistic work of Aḥmad Ghorab, this opinion is held against Watt as one who distorts Islam.[132] Ghorab claims to have traced the source of Watt's opinion to the work of Karl Barth who was known to have whipped up anti-Nazi emotions by

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129 Ibid., p. 324-334.
130 See esp. Watt, Ibid. and Prophet and Statesman, pp. 229-240.
131 Watt, Prophet and Statesman, pp. 229-240.
132 See his Subverting Islam - The Role of Orientalist Centres, (London: Minerva Press, 1994), pp.21-22.

comparing Nazism with Islam. Ghorab quotes from Karl Barth thus:

> Where it [Nazism] meets with resistance, it can only crush and kill - with the might and right which belongs to Divinity! Islam of old as we know proceeded in this way. It is impossible to understand National Socialism unless we see it in fact as a new Islam, its myth as a new Allah, and Hitler as this new Allah's prophet.[133]

Despite the general tone of Ghorab's book which we have described as propagandistic, we do not have any reason to discount this opinion. The argument of coincidence could be too difficult to justify. Watt, as a seasoned theologian, should have avoided such comment.

It is probably true that he who tries to trace an age-long development must necessarily neglect much detail. Granting this, one cannot help feeling that despite some very positive and realistic arguments raised, historical reality and even correctness in detail is often lost in the intense haze of abstract speculation . Watt's works, unfortunately, end up being categorised this way. His speculative and generalised methods are too many and are often contradictory.

Of course, this remark does not mean that Watt is just like his predecessors or even contemporaries. He certainly stands apart form Muir and Margoliouth and even most, if not all, of his British colleagues in the field. His interest in Inter-Faith relations as far as Islam is concerned and his anxiety about anti-religious and anti-spiritual philosophies in the world and his call on all men of faith to rally around and defend spirituality all point to very positive attitudes to Islam.

As we said earlier, we have critiqued his work taking a cue from his own statement that

> The sincerest tribute to a scholar is to take his views seriously and criticize him frankly.[134]

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133 Ibid., p. 22, see footnote 7.
Cf. Karl Barth, The Church and the Political Problem of Our Day, (London: Houghton & Stoughton, 1939), p. 40.

134 Bell's Introduction, p. v.

To tie up our analysis, in the following section we intend making some remarks on the methodology of studying religion especially in the case where the researcher does not share the faith he is looking at.

6.6 THE QUESTION OF METHODOLOGY IN THE STUDY OF RELIGION.

In scholarship, there are always demands for objectivity, impartiality and the cultivation of dispassionate attitudes. The researcher is always under pressure to allow the text to speak for itself. However, it is a truism that one cannot approach the text with a *tabula rasa*. One's baggage comprising manifold things and values are always bound to play a part in the analysis. The impossibility of completely dispassionate research therefore haunts every scholar.

When such arguments are translated onto the field of religious studies, the problem becomes even more acute.

Muḥammad Mustafā al-Marāghī, Grand Shaikh of al-Azhar, has deliberated on such issues in his foreword to Haykal's work on the life of the Prophet.[135] He writes:

> To suspend all prejudices, to observe, to experiment, to compare, to deduct and to extrapolate are all easy words. But for man standing under an inheritance of heavy biological and mental burdens, struggling against an oppressive environment of home, village, school, city and country, suffering under the tremendous weight of conditioning by temperament, health, disease and passion - how could it be easy for him to apply the law.[136]

The central question is the proper attitude one develops in approaching a religion the one does not share. A.C. Bousquet has given a hint as to what to take into consideration when studying religion.

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135 See Faruqi's Translation.
136 Ibid., p. xxvii.

He advises that one should not approach a particular faith as if it is a fossil because that will be a valueless and meaningless exercise.[137]

If a religion is studied as if it is some ancient museum piece of antiquarian interest, the real essence of it will be lost. Even though a scientific attitude might be brought to bear on that particular religion, if that attitude is taken, it is only the externals that are observed while the real core which matters would be glossed over. The mundane manifestations might be studied but the inner essence is neglected. Symbols might be observed with much curiosity and conclusions deduced from them but the real values which make that particular religion tick would not be reached. In such an approach, the symbol is confused with the Reality which the symbol merely represents. Instead of the symbol becoming a means to an end, it becomes an end in itself.

In the study of Islam and certainly the Prophet, this observation ought to be taken seriously otherwise the real Muḥammad might be missed. Watt has appropriately observed that

> There need be no unbridgeable gulf between Western scholarship and Islamic faith; ...[138]

Indeed, the scientific method which is the bedrock of Western scholarship has been a boon to contemporary advancement in world scholarship because it has helped check the excessive emotions which usually characterise studies which are supposed to be objective. The scientific method enables the student to carefully assemble and verify data and leads to a move towards better accuracy in documentation of observed or verified facts.

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137 See Bousquet, A.C.: Comparative Religion - A Short Outline, (Hammondsworth (Middlesex, U.K.): Penguin Books, 1958 reprint).
See esp. Chpt. 1.

138 See his Mecca, p.x.

However, as a human institution, it needs to be acknowledged that the scientific method is not limitless. It has its own constraints and drawbacks. Without this recognition, scholars would be deifying and thinking of it as an 'Infallible Oracle'.

The scientific method does not have the ultimate ability to probe all things. And it is beyond these limits that the appropriate human faculties have to be marshalled. In the study of religion, this is very crucial.

Ernst Benz of the University of Marburg (Germany) and, formerly, director of the Klopstock Institute in Hamburg and also of the Zeitschirft fur Religions -und Gestesgeschichte, has noted one of the most pervasive obstacles in studying other religions. He says:

> One of the first difficulties to confront even an experienced inquirer into foreign religions is the fact that he more or less unconsciously takes his own point of view as normative for religion in general. This may be a banal statement, for the warning against this mistake is one of the most elementary rules in Inter-religious research. But it is nevertheless amazing to realise how difficult it is to avoid this pitfall.[139]

Once the preconceived baggage is brought to bear on the study, the result is nothing but a sham. As one scholar puts it: where this bias enters, pure scholarship leaves.

Looking at the question of truth and attitudinal behaviour of people towards others who do not share their faith, Vroom has noted that there is always a large amount of prejudice involved.[140] He notes that:

> Scholarly integrity demands that in an endeavour to acquire insight into the theme of religion and truth, philosophy of religion carried out from the perspectives other than that of Western (post) Christian culture not be left out of consideration.[141]

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139 See his paper 'Obstacles to Understanding Other Religions' in Moses Jung et. al. (eds.), Relations Among Religions Today - A Handbook of Policies and Principles, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1963), pp.101-104; quotation on p. 101.

140 See Vroom, Hendrik M.: Religions and the Truth - Philosophical Reflections and Perceptions, translated from the Dutch by J. W. Rebel, (Grand Rapids (Michigan): William B. Berdmans, 1989). See esp. pp.22-25, 370-372.

This reminds us of Gibb's observation that in the case of Islam, it has to be studied form its own principles and standards.[142]

Robinson has also acknowledged the extreme difficulty of remaining perfectly neutral even though he insists that every effort has to be made towards that end.[143]

Despite all these disconcerting observations, we share the view that objectivity, impartiality and judicious application of the tools of modern scholarship are helpful in the study of religion, and Islam for that matter, The difficulties do not mean we have to continuously regurgitate old ideas merely for their own sake. We certainly agree with the optimism of Watt and Rodinson that advancement in scholarship and tremendous consciousness of Inter-Faith Relations bear good signs for a future where the eluding objectivity, fairness and justice which modern Western scholarship claims to be characterised with, would be applied to the study of Islam.

Perhaps it needs to be acknowledged that in a world where geopolitical transformations and the impact of shifting paradigms seem to suggest that Islam ought to be repainted as the new threat to the entire global network of things, perhaps the optimism might be said to be over-rated.[144] However, this effort to arrive at a dispassionate and more judicious application

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141 See his Mohammedanism, p. vi.

142 Ibid., p. 24.

143 See his Europe and the Mystique of Islam, esp. pp. xii-xiv.
See also the concluding sections of the book.

144 See for example:

a. Esposito, J.L., The Islamic Threat - Myth or Reality?, (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).
b. Miller, Judith, 'The Challenge of Radical Islam' in Foreign Affairs Vol. 72, No. 2 (Spring 1993). (Miller characterises Islam as anti-Western, anti-American and anti-Israel).
c. Huntington, S., 'The Clash of Civilizations' in Foreign Affairs Vol. 72, No. 3 (Summer 1993), pp. 22-49. (The post-Huntington reverberations are being felt all around the world).
d. Hippler, J. & Lueg, A. (eds.), The Next Threat - Western Perceptions of Islam, translated by Laila Freise, (London: Pluto Press & Amsterdam), The Transnational Institute, 1995. See esp. Lueg's paper on 'Perceptions of Islam in Western Debate' and Chpt. 6 - 'The Islamic Threat and Western Foreign Policy' by Hippler.

of the ubiquitous 'scientific method' is a form of *Jihād* for all scholars, be they Muslims or otherwise.

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